



# GAMMA

50¢

VOL. 1, NO. 1 1963

CN

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS  
RAY BRADBURY

FORREST J. ACKERMAN  
CHARLES BEAUMONT  
CHARLES E. FRITCH  
FRITZ LEIBER  
RICHARD MATHESON  
KRIS NEVILLE  
WILLIAM F. NOLAN  
RAY RUSSELL  
A. E. VAN VOGT



FIRST  
BIG ISSUE

ROD SERLING



# GAMMA 1

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## ABOUT OUR COVER ARTIST

GAMMA's superbly-gifted cover artist, Morris Scott Dollens, was born in Indiana in 1920, raised in Minnesota's Twin-City area, falling under the comic-book spell of *Buck Rogers* as a boy of 12. He was soon an avid sf reader and collector and, at 16, published a dozen issues of his own sf magazine (while holding down the managing editorship of his school paper). Mastering several technical subjects, Dollens became highly proficient in photography, electronics, sound recording, art and mechanics. He was soon designing, as well as building, his own specialized equipment. Painting began to occupy much of his time — and his awesome renditions of alien worlds, of starships and far galaxies were soon sought-after by collectors. Dollens has produced many of these since he moved to the West Coast in 1952. He has sold artwork and technical articles to several top publications here and abroad, working, with equal success, as a commercial portrait photographer. (Most of Bradbury's book jackets have carried his work.) Joining us at GAMMA, Dollens promises "a solar system series of paintings" — and we intend to bring this entire series to our readers, beginning with the present Moon cover. On the back of each issue a full-color Dollens painting will appear, free of lettering or ads, and suitable for framing. We are especially proud to be able to showcase the stunning space art of Morris Scott Dollens — just one *more* reason to buy each and every issue of GAMMA!

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Now would be a good time to do it.



The dictionary defines GAMMA for us: ". . . to designate some bright star." One look at our cover and at the stunning lineup of stellar names for our next issue will confirm that definition. Indeed, GAMMA is the bright new star of the science fiction/fantasy field, and we intend to see that it continues to light up the heavens. The dictionary goes on to mention the *gamma function* — and we'll assure you that the GAMMA function, in our case, is to give our readers the best fiction, by the finest talents in and out of the sf field — fiction of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. GAMMA will unearth classic fantasy from obscure, out-of-print markets, while creating its own classics and memorable new stories in each issue.

So watch for the GAMMA sign: — bringing you the best in imaginative fiction. — *The Editors*

## COMING —

### IN OUR NEXT BIG ISSUE . . .

Two undiscovered fantasies by the great Nobel Prize winners, ERNEST HEMINGWAY and WILLIAM FAULKNER . . .

A brand new story by the master of modern fantasy, RAY BRADBURY . . .

A revealing, informative interview with one of science fiction's brightest talents, ROBERT SHECKLEY . . .

Fiction by such skilled and popular storytellers as RICHARD MATHESON, JACK FINNEY, ROBERT BLOCH, CHARLES BEAUMONT, SHIRLEY JACKSON . . .

Chicago-born in 1929, struck down by spinal meningitis as a child, and "forced into reading about the land of Oz, which ignited a fire that is still burning in me," Charles Beaumont made his fictional debut in *Amazing Stories* early in 1951. Up to the time he began to earn enough money from his fiction to support himself, his wife Helen and their son Christopher (three more children have been added to the family since those early days), Beaumont washed dishes, ushered in theaters, ran duplicating machines, worked as an animator at MGM studios, edited comic magazines and wrote. He wrote at night and he wrote on weekends, learning his craft. Then his unique, often-shocking, bitter-poetic stories began to sell. The floodgates finally opened and the acceptance checks began pouring in. Now, in 1963, he's a top name in and out of the sf/fantasy field. A regular writer for *Twilight Zone* since its inception, he is a favorite with *Playboy* readers, alternating fact and fiction (and who can forget his jazz masterpiece, *Black Country?*) and is currently a highly paid screen writer (sharing credit for Cinerama's first dramatic venture, *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* — although he said, upon viewing the final result, "Like alchemists, they turned gold, or at least bright copper, into lead.") Beaumont has produced four volumes of short stories, two novels and three anthologies — as well as a forthcoming collection of nostalgia, *Remember? Remember?* His TV sales are rapidly nearing the hundred mark. Beaumont's latest pride is a new Jaguar Mark 10 sedan, and he still successfully races his fast black Porsche at local sports car events (having owned one of the earliest MG-TCs on the West Coast). Despite all this activity, the Beaumont talent for quality fiction continues to produce fresh new off-trail stories such as this, written especially for GAMMA 1.

## MOURNING SONG

*Charles Beaumont*

He had a raven on his shoulder and two empty holes where his eyes used to be, if he ever had

eyes, and he carried a guitar. I saw him first when the snow was walking over the hills, turning

## MOURNING SONG

them to white velvet. I felt good, I felt young, and, in the dead of winter, the spring wind was in my blood. It was a long time ago.

I remember I was out back helping my daddy chop up fire-wood. He had the axe up in the air, about to bring it down on the piece of soft bark I was holding on the block, when he stopped, with the axe in the air, and looked off in the direction of Hunter's Hill. I let go of the bark and looked off that way, too. And that's when I saw Solomon for the first time. But it wasn't the way he looked that scared me, he was too far away to see anything except that it was somebody walking in the snow. It was the way my daddy looked. My daddy was a good big man, as big as any I ever met or saw, and I hadn't ever seen him look afraid, but he looked afraid now. He put the axe down and stood there, not moving or saying anything, only standing there breathing out little puffs of cold and looking afraid.

Then, after a while, the man walking in the snow walked up to the road by our house, and I saw him close. Maybe I wouldn't have been scared if it hadn't been for the way my daddy was acting, but probably I would have been. I was little then and I hadn't ever in my whole life seen anybody without eyes in his head.

My daddy waited until he saw

that the blind man wasn't coming to our house, then he grabbed me up off the ground and hugged me so hard it hurt my chest. I asked him what the matter was, but he didn't answer. He just started off down the road after the blind man. I went along with him, waiting for him to tell me to get on home, but he didn't. We walked for over two miles, and every time we came to somebody's house, the people who lived there would stand out in the yard or inside at the window, watching, the way my daddy did, and when we passed, they'd come out and join the parade. Pretty soon there was us and Jake Overton and his wife and Peter Briley and old man Jaspers and the whole Randall family, and more I can't remember, trailing along down the road together, following the blind man.

I thought sure, somebody said.  
So did I, my daddy said.

Who you suppose it's going to be? Mr. Briley said.

My daddy shook his head. Nobody knows, he said. Except him.

We walked another mile and a half, cutting across the Pritchett's field where the snow was up to my knees, and nobody said anything more. I knew the only place there was in this direction, but it didn't mean anything to me because nobody had ever told me anything about Solomon. I know I wondered as we walked how you

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could see where you were going if you didn't have eyes, and I couldn't see how you could, but that old man knew just exactly where he was going. You knew that by looking at him and watching how he went around stumps and logs on the ground. Once I thought he was going to walk into the plow the Pritchets left out to rust when they got their new one, but he didn't. He walked right around it, and I kept wondering how a thing like that could be. I closed my eyes and tried it but I couldn't keep them closed more than a couple of seconds. When I opened them, I saw that my daddy and all the rest of the people had stopped walking. All except the old blind man.

We were out by the Schreiber place. It looked warm and nice inside with all the lamps burning and gray smoke climbing straight up out of the chimney. Probably the Schreibers were having their breakfast.

Which one, I wonder, my daddy said to Mr. Randall.

The old one, Mr. Randall said.

Yes, that's probably right.

He's going on eighty.

My daddy nodded his head and watched as the old blind man walked through the snow to the big pine tree that sat in the Schreibers' yard and lifted the guitar strap over his head.

Going on eighty, Mr. Randall

said again.

Yes.

It's the old man, all right.

Everybody quieted down then. Everybody stood still in the snow, waiting, what for I didn't know. I wanted to pee. More than anything in the world I wanted to pee, right there in the snow, and watch it melt and steam in the air. But I couldn't, anymore than I could at church. In a way, this was like church.

Up ahead the old blind man leaned his face next to the guitar and touched the strings. I don't know how he thought he was going to play anything in this cold. It was cold enough to make your ears hurt. But he kept touching the strings, and the sound they made was just like the sound any guitar makes when you're trying to get it tuned, except maybe louder. I tried to look at his face, but I couldn't because of those holes where his eyes should have been. They made me sick. I wondered if they went all the way up into his head. And if they didn't, where did they stop?

He began to play the Mourning Song then. I didn't know that was the name of it, or what it meant, or anything, but I knew I didn't like it. It made me think of sad things, like when I went hunting by myself one time and this doe I shot fell down and got up again and started running around in cir-

## MOURNING SONG

cles and finally died right in front of me, looking at me. Or when I caught a bunch of catfish at the slew without bait. I carried them home and everything was fine until I saw that two of them were still alive. So I did what my daddy said was a crazy thing. I put those catfish in a pail of water and carried them back to the slew and dumped them in. I thought I'd see them swim away happy, but they didn't. They sank just like rocks.

That song made me think of things like that, and that was why I didn't like it then, even before I knew anything about it.

Then the old blind man started singing. You wouldn't expect anything but a croak to come out of that toothless old mouth, but if you could take away what he was singing, and the way he looked, you would have to admit he could really sing. He had a high, sweet voice, almost like a woman's, and you could understand every word.

*Long valley, dark valley . . . hear the wind cry! . . . in darkness we're born and in darkness we die . . . all alone, alone, to the end of our days . . . to the end of our days, all alone . . .*

Mr. Schreiber came outside in his shirtsleeves. He looked even more afraid than my daddy had looked. His face was white and you could see, even from where I stood, that he was shaking. His wife came out after a minute and

started crying, then his father, old man Shreiber, and his boy Carl who was my age.

The old blind man went on singing for a long time, then he stopped and put the guitar back over his head and walked away. The Schreibers went back into their house. My daddy and I went back to our own house, not following the blind man this time but taking the long way.

We didn't talk about it till late that night. Then my daddy came into my room and sat down on my bed. He told me that the blind man's name was Solomon, at least that was what people called him because he was so old. Nobody knew how he lost his eyes or how he got around without them, but there were lots of things that Solomon could do that nobody understood.

Like what? I asked.

He scratched his cheek and waited a while before answering. He can smell death, he said, finally. He can smell it coming a hundred miles off. I don't know how. But he can.

I said I didn't believe it. My daddy just shrugged his shoulders and told me I was young. When I got older I'd see how Solomon was never wrong. Whenever Solomon walked up to you, he said, and unslung that guitar and started to sing the Mourning Song, you might as well tell them to dig deep.

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That was why he had looked so scared that morning. He thought Solomon was coming to our house.

But didn't nothing happen to the Schreibers, I said.

You wait, my daddy said. He'll keep on going there and then one day he'll quit.

I did wait, almost a week, but nothing happened, and I began to wonder if my daddy wasn't getting a little feeble, talking about people smelling death and all. Then, on the eighth day, Mr. Randall came over.

The old man? my daddy asked.

Mr. Randall shook his head. Alex, he said, meaning Mr. Schreiber. Took sick last night.

My daddy turned to me and said, You believe it now?

And I said, No, I don't. I said I believed that an old blind man walked up to the Schreibers' house and sang a song and I believed that Mr. Alex Schreiber died a little over a week later but I didn't believe any man could know it was going to happen. Only God could know such a thing, I said.

Maybe Solomon is God, said my daddy.

That dirty old man without any eyes in his head?

Maybe. You know what God looks like?

No, but I know He ain't blind, I know He don't walk around with a bird on His shoulder, I know He don't sing songs.

How do you know that?

I just do.

Well and good, but take heed — if you see him coming, if you just happen to see him coming down from Hunter's Hill some morning, and he passes near you, don't you let him hear you talking like that.

What'll he do?

I don't know. If he can do what he can do, what can't he do?

He can't scare me, that's what—and he can't make me believe in him! You're crazy! I said to my daddy, and he hit me, but I went on saying it at the top of my voice until I fell asleep.

I saw Solomon again about six months later, or maybe a year, I don't remember. Looking the same, walking the same, and half the valley after him. I didn't go along. My daddy did, but I didn't. They all went to the Briley house that time. And Mrs. Briley died four days afterwards. But I said I didn't believe it.

When Mr. Randall himself came running over one night saying he'd had a call from Solomon and him and my daddy got drunk on wine, and Mr. Randall died the next day, even then I didn't believe it.

How much proof you got to have, boy? my daddy said.

I couldn't make it clear then what it was that was tormenting me. I couldn't ask the right questions, because they weren't really questions, then, just feelings. Like,

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this ain't the world here, this place. People die all over the world, millions of people, every day, every minute. You mean you think that old bastard is carting off all over the world? You think he goes to China in that outfit and plays that guitar? And what about the bird? Birds don't live long. What's he got, a dozen of 'em? And, I wanted to know, *why* does he do what he does? What the hell's the point of telling somebody they're going to die if they can't *do* something about it?

I couldn't believe in Solomon because I couldn't understand him. I did say that, and my daddy said, If you could understand him, he wouldn't be Solomon.

What's that mean?

Means he's mysterious.

So's fire, I said. But I wouldn't believe in it if it couldn't put out heat or burn anything.

You're young.

I was, too. Eleven.

By the time I was grown, I had the questions, and I had the answers. But I couldn't tell my daddy. On my eighteenth birthday, we were whooping it up, drinking liquor and singing, when somebody looked out the window. Everything stopped then. My daddy didn't even bother to go look.

Could be for anybody here, somebody said.

No. I feel it. It's for me.

You don't know.

I know. Lonnie's a man now, it's time for me to move on.

I went to the window. Some of the people we hadn't invited were behind Solomon, gazing at our house. He had the guitar unslung, and he was strumming it.

The people finished up their drinking quietly and looked at my daddy and went back out. But they didn't go home, not until Solomon did.

I was drunk, and this made me drunker. I remember I laughed, but my daddy, he didn't, and in a little while he went on up to bed. I never saw him look so tired, so worn out, never, and I saw him work in the field eighteen hours a day for months.

Nothing happened the first week. Nor the second. But he didn't get out of bed that whole time, and he didn't talk. He just waited.

The third week, it came. He started coughing. Next day he called for my mother, dead those eighteen years. Doc Garson came and looked him over. Pneumonia, he said.

That morning my daddy was still and cold.

I hated Solomon then, for the first time, and I hated the people in the valley. But I couldn't do anything about it. We didn't have any money, and nobody would ever want to buy the place. So I settled in, alone, and worked and

## CHARLES BEAUMONT

tried to forget about the old blind man. He came to me at night, in my sleep, and I'd wake up, mad, sometimes, but I knew a dream couldn't hurt you, unless you let it. And I didn't plan to let it.

Etilla said I was right, and I think that's when I first saw her. I'd seen her every Sunday at church, with her ma, when my daddy and I went there together, but she was only a little thing then. I didn't even know who she was when I started buying grain from her at the store, and when she told me her name, I just couldn't believe it. I don't think there's been many prettier girls in the world. Her hair wasn't golden, it was kind of brown, her figure wasn't skinny like the pictures, but full and lush and she had freckles, but I knew, in a hurry, that she was the woman I wanted. I hadn't ever felt the way she made me feel. Excited and nervous and hot.

It's love, Bundy Matthews said. He was my best friend. You're in love.

How do you know?

I just do.

....

But what if she ain't in love with me?

You're a fool.

How can I find out?

You can't, not if you don't do anything except stand there and buy grain off of her.

It was the hardest thing I'd ever done, asking her to walk with me,

but I did it, and she said yes, and that's when I found out that Bundy was right. All the nervousness went away, but the excitement and heat, they stayed. I felt wonderful. Every time I touched her it made my whole life up to then nothing but getting ready, just twenty-four years of getting ready to touch Etilla.

Nothing she wouldn't talk about, that girl. Even Solomon, who never was talked about, ever, by anybody else, except when he was traveling.

Wonder where he lives, I'd say.

Oh, probably in some cave somewhere, she'd say.

Wonder *how* he lives.

I don't know what you mean.

I mean, where does he find anything to eat.

I never thought about it.

Stray dogs, probably.

And we'd laugh and then talk about something else. Then, after we'd courted six months, I asked Etilla to be my bride, and she said yes.

We set the date for the first of June, and I mean to tell you, I worked from dawn to dusk, every day, just to keep from thinking about it. I wanted so much to hold her in my arms and wake up to find her there beside me in the bed that it hurt, all over. It wasn't like any other hurt. It didn't go away, or ease. It just stayed inside me, growing, till I honestly thought

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I'd break open.

I was thinking about that one day, out in the field, when I heard the music. I let go of the plow and turned around, and there he was, maybe a hundred yards away. I hadn't laid eyes on him in six years, but he didn't look any different. Neither did the holes where his eyes used to be, or the raven. Or the people behind him.

*Long valley, dark valley . . . hear the wind cry! . . . in darkness we're born and in darkness we die . . . all alone, alone, to the end of our days . . . to the end of our days, all alone . . .*

I felt the old hate come up then, because seeing him made me see my daddy again, and the look on my daddy's face when he held the axe in the air that first time and when he died.

But the hate didn't last long, because there wasn't any part of me that was afraid, and that made me feel good. I waited for him to finish and when he did, I clapped applause for him, laughed, and turned back to my plowing. I didn't even bother to see when they all left.

Next night I went over to Etilla's, the way I did every Thursday night. Her mother opened the door, and looked at me and said, You can't come in, Lonnrie.

Why not?

You know why not.

No, I don't. Is it about me and

Etilla?

You might say. I'm sorry, boy. What'd I do?

No answer.

I didn't do anything. I haven't done what you think. We said we'd wait.

She just looked at me.

You hear me? I promised we'd wait, and that's what we're going to do. Now let me in.

I could see Etilla standing back in the room, looking at me. She was crying. But her mother wouldn't open the door any farther.

Tell me!

He called on you, boy. Don't you know that?

Who?

Solomon.

So what? I don't believe in all that stuff, and neither does Etilla. It's a lot of lies. He's just a crazy old blind man. Isn't that right, Etilla!

I got mad then, when she didn't answer, and I pushed the door open and went in. Etilla started to run. I grabbed her. It's lies, I said. We agreed on that!

I didn't think he'd call on you, Lonnrie, she said.

Her mother came up. He never fails, she said. He's never been wrong in forty years.

I know, and I know why, too! I told her. Because everybody *believes* in him. They never ask questions, they never think, they just believe, and *that's* why he never

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fails! Well, I want you to know I don't believe and neither does Etilla and that's why this is *one* time he's going to fail!

I could have been talking to cordwood.

Etilla, tell your mother I'm right! Tell her we're going to be married, just like we planned, and we aren't going to let an old man with a guitar spoil our life.

I won't let her marry you, the old woman said. Not now. I like you, Lonnie Younger, you're a good, strong, hard-working boy, and you'd made my girl a fine husband, but you're going to die soon and I don't want Etilla to be a widow. Do you?

No, you know I don't, but I keep trying to tell you, I'm *not* going to die. I'm healthy, and if you don't believe it, you go ask Doc Garson.

It wouldn't matter. Your daddy was healthy, remember, and so was Ed Kimball and Mrs. Jackson and little Petey Griffin, and it didn't matter. Solomon knows. He smells it.

The way Etilla looked at me, I could have been dead already.

I went home then and tried to get drunk, but it didn't work. Nothing worked. I kept thinking about that old man and how he took the one thing I had left, the one good, beautiful thing in my whole life, and tore it away from me.

He came every day, like always,

followed by the people, and I kept trying to see Etilla. But I felt like a ghost. Her mother wouldn't even come to the door.

I'm alive! I'd scream at them. Look at me. I'm alive!

But the door stayed barred.

Finally, one day, her mother yelled at me, Lonnie! You come here getting my Etilla upset one more time and I'll shoot you and then see how alive you'll be!

I drank a quart of wine that night, sitting by the window. The moon was bright. You could see like it was day, almost. For hours the field was empty, then they came, Solomon at their head.

His voice might not have been different, but it seemed that way, I don't know how. Softer, maybe, or higher. I sat there and listened and looked at them all, but when he sang those words, *All alone*, I threw the bottle down and ran outside.

I ran right up to him, closer than anyone ever had got, I guess, close enough to touch him.

God damn you, I said.

He went on singing.

Stop it!

He acted like I wasn't there.

You may be blind, you crazy old son of a bitch, but you're not deaf! I'm telling you — and all the rest of you — to get off my property, now! You hear me?

He didn't move. I don't know what happened inside me, then,

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except that all the hate and mad and sorrow I'd been feeling came back and bubbled over. I reached out first and grabbed that bird on his shoulder. I held it in my hands and squeezed it and kept on squeezing it till it stopped screaming. Then I threw it away.

The people started to murmuring then, like they'd seen a dam burst, or an earthquake, but they didn't move.

Get out of here! I yelled. Go sing to somebody else, somebody who believes in you. I don't. Hear me? I don't!

I pulled his hands away from the strings. He put them back. I pulled them away again.

You got them all fooled, I said. But I know you can't smell death, or anything else, because you stink so bad yourself! I turned to the people. Come and take a sniff! I told them. Take a sniff of an old man who hasn't been near a cake of soap in all his life — see what it is you been afraid of!

They didn't move.

He's only a man! I yelled. Only a man!

I saw they didn't believe me, so I knew I had to show them, and I think it came to me that maybe this would be the way to get Etilla back. I should have thought of it before! If I could prove he wasn't anything but a man, they'd all have to see they were wrong, and that would save them because then

they wouldn't just lie down and die, like dogs, whenever they looked out and saw Solomon and heard that damn song. Because they wouldn't *see* Solomon. He'd be gone.

I had my hands around his throat. It felt like wet leather. I pressed as hard as I could, and kept on pressing, with my thumbs digging into his gullet, deeper and deeper, and then I let him drop. He didn't move.

Look at him, I yelled, holding up my hands. He's dead! Solomon is dead! God is dead! The man is dead! I killed him!

The people backed away.

Look at him! Touch him! You want to smell death, too? Go ahead, do it!

They were gone.

I laughed till I cried, then I ran all the way to Etilla's house. Her mother shot at me, just the way she said she would, but I knew she'd miss. It was an old gun, she was an old woman. I kicked the door open. I grabbed them both and practically dragged them back to my place. They thought I was crazy. I scared them bad. I didn't care. They had to see it with their own eyes. They had to see the old man sprawled out dead on the ground.

He was right where I dropped him.

Look at him, I said, and it was close to dawn now so they could

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see him even better. His face was blue and his tongue was sticking out of his mouth like a fat black snake.

I took loose the guitar while they were looking and stomped it to pieces.

They looked up at me, then, and started running.

I didn't bother to go after them, because it didn't matter any more.

It didn't matter, either, when Sheriff Crowder came to see me the next day.

You did murder, Lonnie, he said. Thirty people saw you.

I didn't argue.

He took me to the jail and told me I was in bad trouble, but I shouldn't worry too much, considering the facts. He never thought Solomon was anything but a lunatic, and he didn't think the judge would be too hard on me. Of course it could turn out either way, and he wasn't promising anything,

but probably it would go all right.

I *didn't* worry, either. Not until last night. I was lying on my cot, sleeping, when I had a dream. It had to be, because I heard Solomon. His voice was clear and high, and sadder than it had ever been. And I saw him, too, when I went to the window and looked out. It was him and no question, standing across the street under a big old elm tree, singing.

*Long valley, dark valley . . . hear the wind cry! . . . in darkness we're born and in darkness we die . . . all alone, alone, to the end of our days . . . to the end of our days, all alone . . .*

It scared me, all right, that dream, but I don't think it will scare me much longer. I mean I really don't.

Tomorrow's the trial. And when it's over, I'm going to take me a long trip. I am.



The son of a distinguished Shakespearean actor, Fritz Leiber has himself recited "trippingly on the tongue" the words of the immortal Bard of Avon, acting for two years in his father's Shakespearean company and later taking the lead in a Chicago stage production of *Othello*. As a writer, Leiber gained overnight acceptance in the pages of *Unknown* in the early forties, and his chilling study of witchcraft in our modern age, *Conjure Wife*, remains one of the finest novels of terror and suspense ever published. Other Leiber classics include *Gather, Darkness!* and *Night's Black Agents* (his first collection of stories, released in 1947). Leiber has edited *Science Digest*, developed impressive skill as a chess player, worked as a mathematician — and produced a host of superbly-written sf and fantasy stories over the past two decades. This new one is as "far out" as anything the unpredictable Leiber has yet conjured up, combining his Shakespearean expertise with his zany, wonderfully-outré sense of humor. We doubt that you've ever read anything *quite* like it!

## CRIMES AGAINST PASSION:

A JITNEY TRIP TO THE END OF THE UNIVERSE OF LOVE, AND BACK AGAIN, INCLUDING AT NO EXTRA CHARGE A REEXAMINATION OF THE FOIBLES OF THE GREAT AND A REWRITING OF AMATORY AND HOMICIDAL HISTORY.

*Fritz Leiber*

*The scene is the Hall of the Great Guilty Lovers in Hell — roofed with stars that glitter like the first glances of fatal love, paved with sulphurous cosmic darkness asurge with desire, and walled with distant nebulas and galaxies that intertwine lasciviously. Empty at first, it swiftly fills with airy spirits who come swooping chiefly in couples, but not all,*

*for the Great Self-Lovers of history and romance are here — and these wander the universe as solitaries. All are tragic-eyed and hauntingly familiar, some are crowned, many are beautiful. They whisper together excitedly and the stars tremble like leaves.*

*Two figures buzz in importantly, riding tiny comets that leave putt-putt trails like motorcycles. They*

dismount. The first, who wears the black robe and wig of a judge, climbs and stands on top of a very small sun, the golden prickles of which make it look rather like a huge golden seal on a legal document. The second, who wears a modern tweed suit, lounges on a convenient asteroid and very casually fills and lights a pipe of briar rough as the asteroid's surface.

THE JUDGE (*claps his hands for silence*): Spirits of the damned, some of you may be wondering why you have been summoned from the lonely spaceways of torment. As you know, your cases were all considered long ago, judgment given, and the usual sentence pronounced of eternal wandering and wailing. But of late, rumors have come to the Higher Power that some of you do not feel you have been given a square deal. This minority has procured a defender. We will hear from him.

THE PSYCHIATRIST FOR THE DEFENSE (*from his asteroid, pipe in hand*): Your Honor. Suffering Sprites. In recent years earthly thinkers have achieved an astonishing revision of our knowledge of the human psyche. I need mention only such new fields as psychiatry, psychoanalysis, sexology, sociology, social psychiatry, group therapy, client-centered therapy, dynamic psychology, social remedial psychiatry, and non-directive dynamic psychodramatic

social remedial psychiatry. Most important of all, a new concept of human responsibility has been developed: in the classic words of at least every other modern murderer, "The gun shot itself." So I strongly feel that each and every one of you (*he waves his pipe toward the crowd of Guilty Lovers*) should be given full opportunity to restate his or her case in the light of the new legal resources and reliefs it provides!

JUDGE (*addressing the Spirits*): My first thought is that all you (ahem!) occupants of the hot corners of history's bloody triangles would wish to go on glorying self-willedly in your tragic fates. (*There is a murmuring throughout the hall and one or two cries of, "No."*) I should think you would be happy to be eternally swept by great winds through the cold and the dark, sharing your memories and miseries, while at the same time providing lovely somber legends for the living. (*The murmuring grows louder and the negative cries increase to a dozen or so.*) I should think that some of you, at least, would hold to the position that you have sinned and done a murder or two for love and are willing to abide by the consequences, but— (*The murmuring becomes one of obvious protest and the cries of "No!" and "No, no!" spring from all the insubstantial lips.*) —it appears that I may

## CRIMES AGAINST PASSION

be mistaken. The modern psycho-centric infection may be spreading even through these starry voids. You! (*He motions to a dark-haired beauty wearing a cap embroidered with pearls.*) We'll begin with you.

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI (*floating forward*): I'm absolutely innocent, Judge. Paolo was teaching me a new swimming stroke. Giovanni misunderstood our relationship.

PAOLO: I was only an Italian lifeguard trying to turn an honest ducat. She was just one more little signora who'd bought the twenty lessons.

FRANCESCA: And while you can't learn swimming in a flogging, Judge, I did have my shoes on.

GIOVANNI: I blundered in while cleaning my sword. I was afraid Franny and Pao would think I had misinterpreted their swimming relationship and I tried to get out without embarrassing them. Walking on tiptoes, I slipped on a throw rug. I fell toward the innocent student and mentor. The sword twisted toward them in my hand—it seemed to have a life of its own! (*He covers his eyes to shut out the horrid memory.*) It was all an accident.

PAOLO: A painful contretemps.

FRANCESCA: I'm just a child. (*Claps her hands.*) Imminy, pimminy, send me back to Rimini!

JUDGE: I'll take that under

consideration. (*Points toward a stately beauty in blood-spattered Grecian robes.*) Next case!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*sweeping toward him*): I never for one instant premeditated stabbing Agamemnon in his bath, though I'll admit I was burned when he stayed ten years in Troy and then brought home that know-it-all huzzy Cassandra and expected me to live in the same stronghold with her — and when a woman's consumed by jealousy, Judge, she's not responsible for anything she does. But I didn't do anything! Agamemnon asked me for a butcher knife to pare his toenails and the rest was all an accident. Statistics prove that thirty-seven point three percent of all fatal home accidents occur in bathtubs.

AEGISTHUS: That's the truth, Judge. And Clytemnestra and I weren't paramours — why, I think we were working for MGM at the time.

JUDGE: Please, no commercials. (*Turns to a fierce, ravaged-looking Italian.*) You, sir.

GUIDO FRANCESCHINI: I was out of my head when I stabbed Pompilia and her folks. I just wanted to punish her a little. My emotions boiled over. Mr. Browning was an Englishman. He didn't understand the fiery Mediterranean temperament or anything about the science of temperatures when he made me a

cold-blooded villain in "The Ring and the Book."

ROMEO: Since you're hearing the Italian cases, Judge, I want to point out that when I stabbed Tybalt I was just a mixed-up kid, a juvenile delinquent.

JULIET: So was I, Judge. Read all about it in "The West Side Story."

JUDGE (*sternly*): You heard my warning to Aegisthus! And now . . . Well, what is it? (*This last to a hefty handsome couple in greens and reds and golds, who have shoved their way to universe front.*)

TRISTRAM: I was drugged!

ISEULT: No, I was, Judge. That love potion was really loaded. I think it was white slavers.

TRISTRAM: Without that goof-goblet I wouldn't have given her a second look.

ISEULT: One little laudanum highball and I'm defenseless.

TRISTRAM: If they'd have had Alcoholics Anonymous or an alert Narcotics Squad or just Ann Landers in ancient Cornwall, it would never have happened.

KING MARK (*stumbling after them through space*): There was a fly buzzing in the dark. I reached for the swatter and by mistake picked up a battle-axe. I didn't realize the fly was Tristram snoring. And Judge, I didn't make those mis-identifications — my Id did!

ISEULT: And as for that lie about my poisoning Tristram's wound, why Judge, I hardly know potassium cyanide from adder venom from arsenic from strychnine.

JUDGE: Aren't you getting your myths mixed? You and King Mark can't both have killed Tristram.

ISEULT (*triumphantly*): You said the word first, Judge—myths!

TRISTRAM: And I can't be killed twice for the same offense, can I? That's a cruel and unusual punishment.

LANCELOT (*sticking an elbow in Tristram's stomach and shoving forward past him*): I want it on record as of now that I never had a wrong thought about Guinevere. I was simply an old friend of the family.

KING ARTHUR: He's right, your honor. Many's the evening we boozed lightly and played the royal game together.

GUINEVERE: Yes, and Lance-lot and I were merely composing a new chess problem for Art when the evil men surprised us. Lance had loosened his doublet for a difficult knight move and . . .

JUDGE: Please, please! Stop this disgraceful showup! If you'd all step back . . . (*But a hush falls as the crowd voluntarily makes way for the Melancholy Prince, who treads softly, his eyes brimming with self-pity.*)

HAMLET: It was all aboulia

## CRIMES AGAINST PASSION

and Oedipus Complex. Subconsciously I wasn't killing my uncle, just my father. As for Ophelia, I told her to go to a sanitarium. I was bounded in a nutshell — imagine that, Judge. I suffered from hallucinations — I kept seeing the ghost of my male parent. It can be established that I had suicidal designs. A dozen characters and any number of German literary critics will testify that I was crazy. I didn't really believe there was anybody behind that arras when I stabbed Polonius — I was just making a grandstand play.

MACBETH (*shouting from a far corner*): I was the victim of supernatural forces! Spectral daggers dazzled my eyes! Three evil spirits — readily identifiable as a trifid version of Jung's anima — made me their dupe! Lay off, Macduff!

LADY MACK: Look at my hands, Judge. They're absolutely spotless — and not by courtesy of any ocean bathing or arabian toilet water either.

JUDGE: Well, since it seems we're having the great tragic characters from Shakespeare, we might as well get through them fast. Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?

OTHELLO (*from another far corner*): Nobody here, boss, but us chickens!

CLEOPATRA (*nervously swinging her adder by the tail*): Antony

and I never intended to embroil the world in war. Our delusions of grandeur got the better of us — paranoia, pure and simple. Would a sane woman drink pearls in vinegar? We didn't need love, we needed psychiatry.

ANTONY: We were chronologically middle-aged and physiologically senile. We needed geriatrics.

CALIGULA (*suddenly hurtling forward, his toga flying*): My incredibly evil actions were all inspired by comic books. My father and mother didn't give me good supervision. They dragged me around from one Roman camp to another—tents, tents, tents! An ignorant old soldier, the same that made me my little boots, put the first yule volume into my hands. It was called "Super-Caesar."

TIBERIUS: I was a sexual misfit. All the time I spent having orgies at Capri, I was utterly miserable.

NERO: When I built the collapsing boat for Mama, I was the slave of man's most basic mania. Hamlet said it for me — Oedipus Complex.

OEDIPUS: Leave something for me, boys.

ADAM (*thrusting all the rest aside*): She told me it was an onion, Judge, and she held my nose while I nibbled it. Modern psychology proves that under those conditions you can't taste the difference.

EVE (*thrusting Adam aside*): There I was with that big snake coiled five times around me, ready to crush me if I hesitated. What would you do, Judge, if you got into a situation like that with a boa constrictor? Besides, I was only trying to get Adam hooked on the apple habit — nothing serious like marijuana or cholesterol.

JUDGE (*blowing up at last*): Apple habit! Don't you see that's the one thing you don't have any more, any of you? — the knowledge of good and evil!

EVE (*consolingly*): Don't you take on so, Judge. We're not worried any more. Mama—well, there's the whole human race, isn't there? — knows best.

*While the Judge tears his wig and finally jumps up and down on it, and while the Psychiatrist for the Defense placidly puffs his briar pipe, all the rest advance to universe front, join hands, and sing the Finale:*

It was the knife, the gun . . . the great big blunderbuss—

It really wasn't us, Judge,  
it really wasn't us.  
It was neurosis, psychosis . . .  
and things we can't discuss—  
It really wasn't us, Judge,  
it really wasn't us.  
It was my father, wife, mother  
. . . a fellow they call Gus—  
It really wasn't us, Judge,  
it really wasn't us.  
It was environment, heredity . . .  
perhaps it was my truss—  
It really wasn't us, Judge,  
it really wasn't us.  
It was Kinsey and Krafft-Ebing  
that gave us impetus—  
It really wasn't us, Judge,  
it really wasn't us.  
It was the death wish, compul-  
sion, the big black subcon-  
scious—  
It really wasn't us, Judge,  
it really wasn't us.  
It was our Id and our Libido  
that missed the heavenly bus—  
It really wasn't us, Judge!  
It . . . really . . . wasn't . . . us!  
*There falls a curtain of shooting stars, 32 caliber.*



Ray Douglas Bradbury needs no introduction to the fantasy reader. Since 1940, this remarkable prose-wizard has had some 300 of his intensely-personal short stories and articles printed in every magazine from *Harper's* to *Super Science Stories*. His many books reflect what critic Christopher Isherwood (in his oft-quoted review of *The Martian Chronicles*) called "a very great and unusual talent." In all of his work, whether he is dealing with fact (as he so brilliantly did for *Life* in his recent article on space, *Cry the Cosmos*) or fiction (from the biting satire of *Fahrenheit 451* to the glimmering beauty of his *Post* story, *The Beggar on the Dublin Bridge*), Ray Bradbury is a man vitally concerned with our changing world. In the narrative which follows he deals with Time Travel, summer night, lost holidays, the circus and children — all familiar elements in the Bradbury canon — adroitly combining them in a sensitive, richly-imaged style which has earned him a permanent place in the front rank of America's master storytellers.

## TIME IN THY FLIGHT

*Ray Bradbury*

A wind blew the long years away past their hot faces.

The Time Machine stopped.

"Nineteen hundred and twenty-eight," said Janet. The two boys looked past her.

Mr. Fields stirred. "Remember, you're here to observe the behavior of these ancient people. Be inquisitive, be intelligent, observe."

"Yes," said the girl and the two boys in crisp khaki uniforms. They wore identical haircuts, had identical wristwatches, sandals and coloring of hair, eyes, teeth and

skin, though they were not related.

"Shh!" said Mr. Fields.

They looked out at a little Illinois town in the spring of the year. A cool mist lay on the early morning streets.

Far down the street a small boy came running in the last light of the marble-cream moon. Somewhere a great clock struck five A. M. far away. Leaving tennis-shoe prints softly in the quiet lawns, the boy stepped near the invisible Time Machine and cried

up to a high dark house window.

The house window opened. Another boy crept down the roof to the ground. The two boys ran off with banana-filled mouths into the dark cold morning.

"Follow them," whispered Mr. Fields. "Study their life patterns. Quick!"

Janet and William and Robert ran on the cold pavements of spring, visible now, through the slumbering town, through a park. All about, lights flickered, doors clicked and other children rushed alone or in gasping pairs down a hill to some gleaming blue tracks.

"Here it comes!" The children milled about before dawn. Far down the shining tracks a small light grew seconds later into steaming thunder.

"What is it!" screamed Janet.

"A train, silly, you've seen pictures of them!" shouted Robert.

And as the Time Children watched, from the train stepped gigantic grey elephants, steaming the pavements with their mighty waters, lifting question-mark nozzles to the cold morning sky. Cumbersome wagons rolled from the long freight flats, red and gold. Lions roared and paced in boxed darkness.

"Why—*this* must be a—circus!" Janet trembled.

"You think so? Whatever happened to them?"

"Like Christmas, I guess. Just

vanished, long ago."

Janet looked around. "Oh, it's awful, isn't it."

The boys stood numbed. "It sure is."

Men shouted in the first faint gleam of dawn. Sleeping cars drew up, dazed faces blinked out at the children. Horses clattered like a great fall of stones on the pavement.

Mr. Fields was suddenly behind the children. "Disgusting, barbaric, keeping animals in cages. If I'd known this was here, I'd never let you come see. This is a terrible ritual."

"Oh, yes." But Janet's eyes were puzzled. "And yet, you know, it's like a nest of maggots. I want to study it."

"I don't know," said Robert, his eyes darting, his fingers trembling. "It's pretty crazy. We might try writing a thesis on it if Mr. Fields says it's all right . . ."

Mr. Fields nodded. "I'm glad you're digging in here, finding motives, studying this Horror. All right — we'll see the circus this afternoon."

"I think I'm going to be sick," said Janet.

The Time Machine hummed.

"So that was a circus," said Janet, solemnly.

The Trombone circus died in their ears. The last thing they saw was candy-pink trapeze people whirling while baking powder

## TIME IN THY FLIGHT

clowns shrieked and bounded.

"You must admit psycho-vision's better," said Robert slowly.

"All those nasty animal smells, the excitement." Janet blinked. "That's bad for children, isn't it? And those older people seated with the children. Mothers, fathers, they called them. Oh, that *was* strange."

Mr. Fields put some marks in his class grading book.

Janet shook her head numbly. "I want to see it all again. I've missed the motives somewhere. I want to make that run across town again in the early morning. The cold air on my face — the sidewalk under my feet — the circus train coming in. Was it the air and the early hour that made the children get up and run to see the train come in? I want to retrace the entire pattern. Why should they be excited? I feel I've missed out on the answer."

"They all smiled so much," said William.

"Manic-depressives," said Robert.

"What are summer vacations? I heard them talk about it." Janet looked at Mr. Fields.

"They spent their summers racing about like idiots, beating each other up," replied Mr. Fields seriously.

"I'll take our State Engineered summers of work for children anytime," said Robert, looking at nothing, his voice faint.

The Time Machine stopped again.

"The Fourth of July," announced Mr. Fields. "Nineteen hundred and twenty-eight. An ancient holiday when people blew each other's fingers off."

They stood before the same house on the same street but on a soft summer evening. Fire wheels hissed, on front porches laughing children tossed things out that went bang!

"Don't run!" cried Mr. Fields. "It's not war, don't be afraid!"

But Janet's and Robert's and William's faces were pink, now blue, now white with fountains of soft fire.

"We're all right," said Janet, standing very still.

"Happily," announced Mr. Fields, "they prohibited fireworks a century ago, did away with the whole messy explosion."

Children did fairy dances, weaving their names and destinies on the dark summer air with white sparklers.

"I'd like to do that," said Janet, softly. "Write my name on the air. See? I'd like that."

"What?" Mr. Fields hadn't been listening.

"Nothing," said Janet.

"Bang!" whispered William and Robert, standing under the soft summer trees, in shadow, watching, watching the red, white and green fires on the beautiful sum-

mer night lawns. "Bang!"

October.

The Time Machine paused for the last time, an hour later in the month of burning leaves. People hustled into dim houses carrying pumpkins and corn shocks. Skeletons danced, bats flew, candles flamed, apples swung in empty doorways.

"Hallowe'en," said Mr. Fields. "The acme of horror. This was the age of superstition, you know. Later they banned the Grimm Brothers, ghosts, skeletons and all that claptrap. You children, thank God, were raised in an antiseptic world of no shadows or ghosts. You had decent holidays like William C. Chatterton's Birthday, Work Day and Machine Day."

They walked by the same house in the empty October night, peering in at the triangle-eyed pumpkins, the masks leering in black attics and damp cellars. Now, inside the house, some party children squatted telling stories, laughing!

"I want to be inside with them," said Janet at last.

"Sociologically, of course," said the boys.

"No," she said.

"What?" asked Mr. Fields.

"No, I just want to be inside, I just want to stay here, I want to see it all and be here and never be anywhere else, I want firecrackers and pumpkins and circuses, I want Christmases and Valentines

and Fourths, like we've seen."

"This is getting out of hand . . ." Mr. Fields started to say.

But suddenly Janet was gone. "Robert, William, come on!" She ran. The boys leaped after her.

"Hold on!" shouted Mr. Fields. "Robert! William, I've got you!" He seized the last boy, but the other escaped. "Janet, Robert — come back here! You'll never pass into the seventh grade! You'll fail, Janet, Bob — *Bob!*"

An October wind blew wildly down the street, vanishing with the children off among moaning trees.

William twisted and kicked.

"No, not you, too, William, you're coming home with me. We'll teach those other two a lesson they won't forget. So they want to stay in the Past, do they?" Mr. Fields shouted so everyone could hear. "All right, Janet, Bob, stay in this horror, in this chaos! In a few weeks you'll come sniveling back here to me. But I'll be gone! I'm leaving you here to go mad in this world!"

He hurried William to the Time Machine. The boy was sobbing. "Don't make me come back here on any more Field Excursions ever again, please, Mr. Fields, please—"

"Shut up!"

Almost instantly the Time Machine whisked away toward the Future, toward the underground hive cities, the metal buildings, the

## TIME IN THY FLIGHT

metal flowers, the metal lawns.

"Goodbye, Janet, Bob!"

A great cold October wind blew through the town like water. And when it had ceased blowing it had carried all the children, whether invited or uninvited, masked or unmasked, to the doors of houses which closed upon them. There

was not a running child anywhere in the night. The wind whined away in the bare treetops.

And inside the big house, in the candlelight, someone was pouring cold apple cider all around, to everyone, no matter *who* they were.



### WATCH FOR:

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

WILLIAM FAULKNER

RAY BRADBURY

ROBERT SHECKLEY

SHIRLEY JACKSON

CHARLES BEAUMONT

RICHARD MATHESON

—all in the next issue of GAMMA

Pulitzer Prize winning Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams has garnered considerable wealth, international fame and countless awards for his poetic, savage, soul-revealing excursions into modern drama. From his latest Broadway production *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*, through *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Sweet Bird of Youth* to the shattering power of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he has single-handedly reshaped the dramatic concept of the American stage. Now in his fifties, Williams has also published two volumes of short stories, a novel and numerous poems in addition to his original screenplay, *Baby Doll*. This incredible talent flowered at a very early age—for Tom Williams was still a junior in high school when he wrote and sold *The Vengeance of Nitocris* to the famed pulp magazine, *Wetrd Tales*. And although this narrative does bear the occasional juvenile excesses of its 16-year-old author, it is nevertheless, by Williams' own admission, "a prelude to the violence that is considered my trademark." And his mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, further supports this by her statement: "Tom has told me that this story set the keynote for most of his work." We at GAMMA 1 take justifiable pride in bringing this drama of ancient Egypt, of feasting, blood, death and vengeance, back into print for the first time in three and a half decades, since its initial printing in August of 1928. Here, then, is the first professional effort of the man who is today our greatest modern playwright.

## THE VENGEANCE OF NITOCRIS

*Thomas Lanier Williams*

Hushed were the streets of many-peopled Thebes. Those few who passed through them moved with the shadowy fleetness of bats near dawn, and bent their faces from the sky as if fearful of seeing what in their fancies might be hovering there. Weird, high-noted

incantations of a wailing sound were audible through the barred doors. On corners groups of naked and bleeding priests cast themselves repeatedly and with loud cries upon the rough stones of the walks. Even dogs and cats and oxen seemed impressed by some

## THE VENGEANCE OF NITOCRIS

strange menace and foreboding and cowered and slunk dejectedly. All Thebes was in dread. And indeed there was cause for their dread and for their wails of lamentation. A terrible sacrilege had been committed. In all the annals of Egypt none more monstrous was recorded.

Five days had the altar fires of the god of gods, Osiris, been left unburning. Even for one moment to allow darkness upon the altars of the god was considered by the priests to be a great offense against him. Whole years of dearth and famine had been known to result from such an offense. But now the altar fires had been deliberately extinguished, and left extinguished for five days. It was an unspeakable sacrilege.

Hourly there was expectancy of some great calamity to befall. Perhaps within the approaching night a mighty earthquake would shake the city to the ground, or a fire from heaven would sweep upon them, or some monster from the desert, where wild and terrible monsters were said to dwell, would rush upon them and Osiris himself would rise up, as he had done before, and swallow all Egypt in his wrath. Surely some such dread catastrophe would befall them ere the week had passed. Unless—unless the sacrilege were avenged.

But how might it be avenged?

That was the question high lords and priests debated. Pharaoh alone had committed the sacrilege. It was he, angered because the bridge, which he had spent five years in constructing so that one day he might cross the Nile in his chariot as he had once boasted that he would do, had been swept away by the rising waters. Raging with anger, he had flogged the priests from the temple. He had barred the temple doors and with his own breath had blown out the sacred candles. He had defiled the hallowed altars with the carcasses of beasts. Even, it was said in low, shocked whispers, in a mock ceremony of worship he had burned the carrion of a hyena, most abhorrent of all beasts to Osiris, upon the holy altar of gold, which even the most high of priests forbore to lay naked hands upon!

Surely, even though he be Pharaoh, ruler of all Egypt and holder of the golden eagle, he could not be permitted to commit such violent sacrileges without punishment from man. The god Osiris was waiting for them to inflict that punishment, and if they failed to do it, upon them would come a scourge from heaven.

Standing before the awed assembly of nobles, the high Kha Semblor made a gesture with his hands. A cry broke from those who watched. Sentence had been

delivered. Death had been pronounced as doom for the pharaoh.

The heavy, barred doors were shoved open. The crowd came out, and within an hour a well-organized mob passed through the streets of Thebes, directed for the palace of the pharaoh. Mob justice was to be done.

Within the resplendent portals of the palace the pharaoh, ruler of all Egypt, watched with tightened brow the orderly but menacing approach of the mob. He divined their intent. But was he not their pharaoh? He could contend with gods, so why should he fear mere dogs of men?

A woman clung to his stiffened arm. She was tall and as majestically handsome as he. A garb of linen, as brilliantly golden as the sun, entwined her body closely and bands of jet were around her throat and forehead. She was the fair and well-loved Nitocris, sister of the pharaoh.

"Brother, brother!" she cried, "light the fires! Pacify the dogs! They come to kill you."

Only more stern grew the look of the pharaoh. He thrust aside his pleading sister, and beckoned to the attendants.

"Open the doors!"

Startled, trembling, the men obeyed.

The haughty lord of Egypt drew his sword from its sheath. He slashed the air with a stroke

that would have severed stone. Out on the steep steps leading between tall, colored pillars to the doors of the palace he stopped. The people saw him. A howl rose from their lips.

"Light the fires!"

The figure of the pharaoh stood inflexible as rock. Superbly tall and muscular, his bare arms and limbs glittering like burnished copper in the light of the brilliant sun, his body erect and tense in his attitude of defiance, he looked indeed a mortal fit almost to challenge gods.

The mob, led by the black-robed priests and nobles who had arrived at the foot of the steps, now fell back before the stunning, magnificent defiance of their giant ruler. They felt like demons who had assailed the heavens and had been abashed and shamed by the mere sight of that which they had assailed. A hush fell over them. Their upraised arms faltered and sank down. A moment more and they would have fallen to their knees.

What happened then seemed nothing less than a miracle. In his triumph and exultation, the pharaoh had been careless of the crumbling edges of the steps. Centuries old, there were sections of these steps which were falling apart. Upon such a section had the gold-sandaled foot of the pharaoh descended, and it was not

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strong enough to sustain his great weight. With a scuttling sound it broke loose. A gasp came from the mob — the pharaoh was about to fall. He was palpitating, wavering in the air, fighting to retain his balance. He looked as if he were grappling with some monstrous, invisible snake, coiled about his gleaming body. A hoarse cry burst from his lips; his sword fell; and then his body thudded down the steps in a series of somersaults, and landed at the foot, sprawled out before the gasping mob. For a moment there was breathless silence. And then came the shout of a priest.

"A sign from the god!"

That vibrant cry seemed to restore the mob to all of its wolflike rage. They surged forward. The struggling body of the pharaoh was lifted up and torn to pieces by their clawing hands and weapons. Thus was the god Osiris avenged.

A week later another large assembly of persons confronted the brilliant-pillared palace. This time they were there to acknowledge a ruler, not to slay one. The week before they had rended the pharaoh and now they were proclaiming his sister empress. Priests had declared that it was the will of the gods that she should succeed her brother. She was famously beautiful, pious, and wise. The

people were not reluctant to accept her.

When she was borne down the steps of the palace in her rich litter, after the elaborate ceremony of the coronation had been concluded, she responded to the cheers of the multitude with a smile which could not have appeared more amicable and gracious. None might know from that smile upon her beautiful carmine lips that within her heart she was thinking, "These are the people who slew my brother. Ah, god Issus, grant me power to avenge his death upon them!"

Not long after the beauteous Nitocris mounted the golden throne of Egypt, rumors were whispered of some vast, mysterious enterprise being conducted in secret. A large number of slaves were observed each dawn to embark upon barges and to be carried down the river to some unknown point, where they labored through the day, returning after dark. The slaves were Ethiopians, neither able to speak nor to understand the Egyptian language, and therefore no information could be gotten from them by the curious as to the object of their mysterious daily excursions. The general opinion, though, was that the pious queen was having a great temple constructed to the gods and that when it was finished, enormous public banquets

would be held within it before its dedication. She meant it to be a surprise gift to the priests who were ever desirous of some new place of worship and were dissatisfied with their old altars, which they said were defiled.

Throughout the winter the slaves repeated daily their excursions. Traffic of all kinds plying down the river was restricted for several miles to within forty yards of one shore. Any craft seen to disregard that restriction was set upon by a galley of armed men and pursued back into bounds. All that could be learned was that a prodigious temple or hall of some sort was in construction.

It was late in the spring when the excursions of the workmen were finally discontinued. Restrictions upon river traffic were withdrawn. The men who went eagerly to investigate the mysterious construction returned with tales of a magnificent new temple, surrounded by rich, green, tropical verdure, situated near the bank of the river. It was a temple to the god Osiris. It had been built by the queen probably that she might partly atone for the sacrilege of her brother and deliver him from some of the torture which he undoubtedly suffered. It was to be dedicated within the month by a great banquet. All the nobles and the high priests of Osiris, of which there were a tremendous number,

were to be invited.

Never had the delighted priests been more extravagant in their praises of Queen Nitocris. When she passed through the streets in her open litter, bedazzling eyes by the glitter of her golden ornaments, the cries of the people were almost frantic in their exaltation of her.

True to the predictions of the gossipers, before the month had passed the banquet had been formally announced and to all the nobility and the priests of Osiris had been issued invitations to attend.

The day of the dedication, which was to be followed by the night of banqueting, was a gala holiday. At noon the guests of the empress formed a colorful assembly upon the bank of the river. Gayly draped barges floated at their moorings until preparations should be completed for the transportation of the guests to the temple. All anticipated a holiday of great merriment, and the lustful epicureans were warmed by visualizations of the delightful banquet of copious meats, fruits, luscious delicacies and other less innocent indulgences.

When the queen arrived, clamorous shouts rang deafeningly in her ears. She responded with charming smiles and gracious bows. The most discerning observer could not have detected

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anything but the greatest cordiality and kindness reflected in her bearing toward those around her. No action, no fleeting expression upon her lovely face could have caused anyone to suspect anything except entire amicability in her feelings or her intentions. The rats, as they followed the Pied Piper of Hamlin through the streets, entranced by the notes of his magical pipe, could not have been less apprehensive of any great danger impending than were the guests of the empress as they followed her in gayly draped barges, singing and laughing down the sun-glowing waters of the Nile.

The most vivid descriptions of those who had already seen the temple did not prepare the others for the spectacle of beauty and grandeur which it presented. Gasps of delight came from the priests. What a place in which to conduct their ceremonies! They began to feel that the sacrilege of the dead pharaoh was not, after all, to be so greatly regretted, since it was responsible for the building of this glorious new temple.

The columns were massive and painted with the greatest artistry. The temple itself was proportionately large. The center of it was unroofed. Above the entrance were carved the various symbols of the god Osiris, with splendid workmanship. The building was

immensely big, and against the background of green foliage it presented a picture of almost breath-taking beauty. Ethiopian attendants stood on each side of the doorway, their shining black bodies ornamented with bands of brilliant gold. On the interior the guests were inspired to even greater wonderment. The walls were hung with magnificent painted tapestries. The altars were more beautifully and elaborately carved than any seen before. Aromatic powders were burning upon them and sending up veils of scented smoke. The sacramental vessels were of the most exquisite and costly metals. Golden coffers and urns were piled high with perfect fruits of all kinds.

Ah, yes — a splendid place for the making of sacrifices, gloated the staring priests.

Ah, yes indeed, agreed the queen Nitocris, smiling with half-closed eyes, it was a splendid place for sacrifices — especially for the human sacrifice that had been planned. But all who observed that guileful smile interpreted it as gratification over the pleasure which her creation in honor of their god had brought to the priests of Osiris. Not the slightest shadow of portent was upon the hearts of the joyous guests.

The ceremony of dedication occupied the whole of the afternoon. And when it drew to its

impressive conclusion, the large assembly, their nostrils quivering from the savory odor of the roasting meats, were fully ready and impatient for the banquet that awaited them. They gazed about them, observing that the whole building composed an unpartitioned amphitheater and wondering where might be the room of the banquet. However, when the concluding processional chant had been completed, the queen summoned a number of burly slaves, and by several iron rings attached to its outer edges they lifted up a large slab of the flooring, disclosing to the astonished guests the fact that the scene of the banquet was to be an immense subterranean vault.

Such vaults were decidedly uncommon among the Egyptians. The idea of feasting in one was novel and appealing. Thrilled exclamations came from the eager, excited crowd and they pressed forward to gaze into the depths, now brightly illuminated. They saw a room beneath them almost as vast in size as the amphitheater in which they were standing. It was filled with banquet tables upon which were set the most delectable foods and rich, sparkling wines in an abundance that would satiate the banqueters of Bacchus. Luxurious, thick rugs covered the floors. Among the tables passed nymphlike maidens,

and at one end of the room harpists and singers stood, making sublime music.

The air was cool with the dampness of under-earth, and it was made delightfully fragrant by the perfumes of burning spices and the savory odors of the feast. If it had been heaven itself which the crowd of the queen's guests now gazed down upon they would not have considered the vision disappointing. Perhaps even if they had known the hideous menace that lurked in those gay-draped walls beneath them, they would still have found the allurement of the banquet scene difficult to resist.

Decorum and reserve were almost completely forgotten in the swiftness of the guests' descent. The stairs were not wide enough to afford room for all those who rushed upon them, and some tumbled over, landing unhurt upon the thick carpets. The priests themselves forgot their customary dignity and aloofness when they looked upon the beauty of the maiden attendants.

Immediately all of the guests gathered around the banquet tables, and the next hour was occupied in glutinous feasting. Wine was unlimited and so was the thirst of the guests. Goblets were refilled as quickly as they were empty by the capacious mouths of the drinkers. The sing-

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ing and the laughter, the dancing and the wild frolicking grew less and less restrained until the banquet became a delirious orgy.

The queen alone, seated upon a cushioned dais from which she might overlook the whole room, remained aloof from the general hilarity. Her thick black brows twitched; her luminous black eyes shone strangely between their narrow painted lids. There was something peculiarly feline in the curl of her rich red lips. Now and again her eyes sought the section of wall to her left, where hung gorgeous braided tapestries from the East. But it seemed not the tapestries that she looked upon. Color would mount upon her brow and her slender fingers would dig still tighter into the cushions she reclined upon.

In her mind the queen Nitocris was seeing a ghastly picture. It was the picture of a room of orgy and feasting suddenly converted into a room of terror and horror; human beings one moment drunken and lustful, the next screaming in the seizure of sudden and awful death. If any of those present had been empowered to see also that picture of dire horror, they would have clambered wildly to make their escape. But none was so empowered.

With increasing wildness the banquet continued into the middle of the night. Some of the ban-

queters, disgustingly glutinous, still gorged themselves at the greasy tables. Others lay in drunken stupor, or lolled amorously with the slave-girls. But most of them, formed in a great, irregular circle, skipped about the room in a barbaric, joy-mad dance, dragging and tripping each other in uncouth merriment and making the hall ring with their ceaseless shouts, laughter and hoarse song.

When the hour had approached near to midnight, the queen, who had sat like one entranced, arose from the cushioned dais. One last intent survey she gave to the crowded room of banquet. It was a scene which she wished to imprint permanently upon her mind. Much pleasure might she derive in the future by recalling that picture, and then imagining what came afterward — stark, searing terror rushing in upon barbaric joy!

She stepped down from the dais and walked swiftly to the steps. Her departure made no impression upon the revelers. When she arrived at the top of the stairs, she looked down and observed that no one had marked her exit.

Around the walls of the temple, dim - lit and fantastic - looking at night, with the cool wind from the river sweeping through and bending the flames of the tall candelabra, stalwart guardsmen were standing at their posts, and when

the gold-cloaked figure of the queen arose from the aperture, they advanced toward her hurriedly. With a motion, she directed them to place the slab of rock in its tight-fitting socket. With a swift, noiseless hoist and lowering, they obeyed the command. The queen bent down. There was no change in the boisterous sounds from below. Nothing was yet suspected.

Drawing the soft and shimmering folds of her cloak about her with fingers that trembled with eagerness, excitement and the intense emotion which she felt, the queen passed swiftly across the stone floor of the temple toward the open front through which the night wind swept, blowing her cloak in sheenful waves about her tall and graceful figure. The slaves followed after in silent file, well aware of the monstrous deed about to be executed and without reluctance to play their parts.

Down the steps of the palace into the moon-white night passed the weird procession. Their way led them down an obviously secreted path through thick ranks of murmuring palms which in their low voices seemed to be whispering shocked remonstrances against what was about to be done. But in her stern purpose the queen was not susceptible to any discussion from god or man. Vengeance, strongest of passions, made her

obdurate as stone.

Out upon a rough and apparently new-constructed stone pier the thin path led. Beneath, the cold, dark waters of the Nile surged silently by. Here the party came to a halt. Upon this stone pier would the object of their awful midnight errand be accomplished.

With a low-spoken word, the queen commanded her followers to hold back. With her own hand she would perform the act of vengeance.

In the foreground of the pier a number of fantastic, wand-like levers extended upward. Toward these the queen advanced, slowly and stiffly as an executioner mounts the steps of the scaffold. When she had come beside them, she grasped one upthrust bar, fiercely, as if it had been the throat of a hated antagonist. Then she lifted her face with a quick intake of breath toward the moon-lightened sky. This was to her a moment of supreme ecstasy. Grasped in her hand was an instrument which could release awful death upon those against whom she wished vengeance. Their lives were as securely in her grasp as was this bar of iron.

Slowly, lusting upon every triumph-filled second of this time of ecstasy, she turned her face down again to the formidable bar in her hand. Deliberately she drew it back

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to its limit. This was the lever that opened the wall in the banquet vault. It gave entrance to death. Only the other bar now intervened between the banqueters, probably still reveling undisturbed, and the dreadful fate which she had prepared for them. Upon this bar now her jeweled fingers clutched. Savagely this time she pulled it; then with the liteness of a tiger she sprang to the edge of the pier. She leaned over it and stared down into the inky rush of the river. A new sound she heard above the steady flow. It was the sound of waters suddenly diverted into a new channel — an eager, plunging sound. Down to the hall of revelry they were rushing — these savage waters — bringing terror and sudden death.

A cry of triumph, wild and terrible enough to make even the hearts of the brutish slaves turn cold, now broke from the lips of the queen. The pharaoh was avenged.

And even he must have considered his avenging adequate had he been able to witness it.

After the retiring of the queen, the banquet had gone on without interruption of gayety. None noticed her absence. None noticed the silent replacing of the stone in its socket. No premonition of disaster was felt. The musicians, having been informed beforehand of the intended event of the evening,

had made their withdrawal before the queen. The slaves, whose lives were of little value to the queen, were as ignorant of what was to happen as were the guests themselves.

Not until the wall opened up, with a loud and startling crunch, did even those most inclined toward suspicion feel the slightest uneasiness. Then it was that a few noticed the slab to have been replaced, shutting them in. This discovery, communicated throughout the hall in a moment, seemed to instill a sudden fear in the hearts of all. Laughter did not cease, but the ring of dancers were distracted from their wild jubilee. They all turned toward the mysteriously opened wall and gazed into its black depths.

A hush fell over them. And then became audible the mounting sound of rushing water. A shriek rose from the throat of a woman. And then terror took possession of all within the room. Panic like the burst of flames flared into their hearts. Of one accord, they rushed upon the stair. And it, being purposely made frail, collapsed before the foremost of the wildly screaming mob had reached its summit. Turbulently they piled over the tables, filling the room with a hideous clamor. But rising above their screams was the shrill roar of the rushing water, and no sound could be more provoking of dread

and terror. Somewhere in its circuitous route from the pier to the chamber of its reception it must have met with temporary blockade, for it was several minutes after the sound of it was first detected that the first spray of that death-bringing water leapt into the faces of the doomed occupants of the room.

With the ferocity of a lion springing into the arena of a Roman amphitheater to devour the gladiators set there for its delectation, the black water plunged in. Furiously it surged over the floor of the room, sweeping tables before it and sending its victims, now face to face with their harrowing doom, into a hysteria of terror. In a moment that icy, black water had risen to their knees, although the room was vast. Some fell instantly dead from the shock, or were trampled upon by the desperate rushing of the mob. Tables were clambered upon. Lamps and candles were extinguished. Brilliant light rapidly faded to twilight, and a ghastly dimness fell over the room as only the suspended lanterns remained lit. And what a scene of chaotic and hideous horror might a spectator have beheld! The gorgeous trumpery of banquet invaded by howling waters of death! Gayly dressed merrymakers caught suddenly in the grip of terror! Gasps and screams of the dying amid

tumult and thickening dark!

What more horrible vengeance could Queen Nitocris have conceived than this banquet of death? Not Diablo himself could be capable of anything more fiendishly artistic. Here in the temple of Osiris those nobles and priests who had slain the pharaoh in expiation of his sacrilege against Osiris had now met their deaths. And it was in the waters of the Nile material symbol of the god Osiris, that they had died. It was magnificent in its irony!

I would be content to end this story here if it were but a story. However, it is not merely a story, as you will have discerned before now if you have been a student of the history of Egypt. Queen Nitocris is not a fictitious personage. In the annals of ancient Egypt she is no inconspicuous figure. Principally responsible for her prominence is her monstrous revenge upon the slayers of her brother, the narration of which I have just concluded. Glad would I be to end this story here; for surely anything following must be in the nature of an anticlimax. However, being not a mere storyteller here, but having upon me also the responsibility of a historian, I feel obligated to continue the account to the point where it was left off by Herodotus, the great Greek historian. And, there-

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fore, I add this postscript, anti-climax though it be.

The morning of the day after the massacre in the temple, the guests of the queen not having made their return, the citizens of Thebes began to glower with dark suspicions. Rumors came to them through divers channels that something of a most extraordinary and calamitous nature had occurred at the scene of the banquet during the night. Some had it that the temple had collapsed upon the revelers and all had been killed. However, this theory was speedily dispelled when a voyager from down the river reported having passed the temple in a perfectly firm condition but declared that he had seen no signs of life about the place — only the brightly canopied boats, drifting at their moorings.

Uneasiness steadily increased throughout the day. Sage persons recalled the great devotion of the queen toward her dead brother, and noted that the guests at the banquet of last night had been composed almost entirely of those who had participated in his slaying.

When in the evening the queen arrived in the city, pale, silent, and obviously nervous, threatening crowds blocked the path of her chariot, demanding roughly an explanation of the disappearance of her guests. Haughtily she ignored them and lashed forward the horses of her chariot, pushing aside the tight mass of people. Well she knew, however, that her life would be doomed as soon as they confirmed their suspicions. She resolved to meet her inevitable death in a way that befitted one of her rank, not at the filthy hands of a mob.

Therefore, upon her entrance into the palace she ordered her slaves to fill instantly her boudoir with hot and smoking ashes. When this has been done, she went to the room, entered it, closed the door and locked it securely, and then flung herself down upon a couch in the center of the room. In a short time the scorching heat and the suffocating thick fumes of the smoke overpowered her. Only her beautiful dead body remained for the hands of the mob.



In 1940, an arresting 4-part serial, *Slan*, appeared in the pages of *Astounding*. It carried the byline of Canadian-born Alfred Elton van Vogt, and concerned the adventures of a telepath, Jommy Cross. Now considered a science fiction cornerstone, *Slan* was the first book-length effort of van Vogt, who went on to become one of the major figures in his chosen field with such classics as *The World of Null-A*, *The Weapon Makers* and *Voyage of the Space Beagle*. Last year Farrar Strauss released his powerful contemporary novel of Red China, *The Violent Man*, marking van Vogt's first departure from sf in 22 years. However, he has not deserted the field—as he proves with the following little jewel, reflecting, in miniature, the vast power of his distinctive imagination.

## ITSELF!

A. E. van Vogt

Itself, king of the Phillipine Deep — that awesome canyon where the sea goes down six miles — woke from his recharge period and looked around suspiciously.

His Alter Ego said, "Well, how is it with *Itself* today?"

The Alter Ego was a booster, a goader, a stimulant to action, and, in his limited way, a companion.

*Itself* did not answer. During the sleep period, he had drifted over a ravine, the walls of which dropped steeply another thousand feet. Suspiciously, *Itself* glared along the canyon rim.

... Not a visual observation. No light ever penetrated from above into the eternal night here at the deepest bottom of the ocean. *Itself* perceived the black world

which surrounded him with high frequency sounds which he broadcast continuously in all directions. Like a bat in a pitch dark cave, he analyzed the structure of all things in his watery universe by interpreting the returning echoes. And the accompanying emotion of suspicion was a device which impelled *Itself* to record changing pressures, temperatures and current flows. Unknown to him, what he observed became part of the immense total of data by which far away computers estimated the inter-relationship of ocean and atmosphere, and thus predicted water and air conditions everywhere with uncanny exactness.

His was almost perfect perception. Clearly and unmistakably,

## ITSELF!

Itself made out the intruder in the far distance of that twisting ravine. A ship! Anchored to rock at the very edge of the canyon.

The Alter Ego goaded. "You're not going to let somebody invade your territory, are you?"

Instantly, Itself was furious. He activated the jet mechanism in the underslung belly of his almost solid metal body. A nuclear reactor immediately heated the plates of the explosion chamber. The sea water which flowed through the chamber burst into hissing clouds of steam, and he jetted forward like a missile.

Arriving at the ship, Itself attacked the nearest of four anchor lines with the nuclear-powered heat beam in his head. When he had severed it, he turned to the second cable, and burned through it. Then he moved for the third cable.

But the startled beings aboard the alien ship had spotted the twenty-foot monster in the black waters below.

"Analyze its echo pattern!" came the command. That was done, with total skill.

"Feed the pattern back through the infinite altering system till the recorders register a response."

The significant response was: Itself forgot what he was doing. He was drifting blankly away, when his Alter Ego goaded, "Wake up! You're not going to let them

get away with that, are you?"

The defeat had galvanized Itself to a more intense level of rage. He became multiples more sensitive. Now, he simply turned out the alien echo copies.

The new greater anger triggered a second weapon.

Itself's echo system of perception, normally monitored to be safe for all living things in the sea, suddenly strengthened. It became a supersonic beam. Purposefully, Itself started toward the ship.

Watching his approach, the enemy decided to take no chances. "Pull the remaining anchors in!"

Itself headed straight for the nearest part of the vessel. Instantly, those ultrasonic waves started a rhythmic vibration on the hard wall, weakening it.

The metal groaned under a weight of water that at these depths amounted to thousands of tons per square inch. The outer wall buckled with a metallic scream.

The inner wall trembled, but held.

At that point, the appalled defenders got a counter-vibration started, nullified the rhythm of Itself's projections, and were safe.

But it was a sorely wounded ship that now drifted helplessly in a slow current. The aliens had thus far used no energy that might be detected from the surface. But they had come to Earth to estab-

lish a base for invasion. Their instructions were to accumulate enough data about underwater currents to enable them to leave the Deep, and eventually to be able to drift near land, launch atom bombs and drift away again. For this purpose they were mightily armed, and they refused to die in these black waters without a fight.

"What can we do about that demon?"

"Blast it!" someone urged.

"That's dangerous." The alien commander hesitated.

"We can't be in greater danger than we already are."

"True," said the commander, "but frankly I don't know why he's armed at all, and I can't believe he has anything more. Set up a response system. If he does attack with anything new, it will automatically fire back. We'll take that much of a chance."

The second setback had driven Itself completely berserk. He aimed his nuclear pellet gun, firing twice. In the next split-second a blast from the invader pierced his brain.

The Alter Ego yelled, "You're not going to let them get away with that, are you?"

But the king of the Phillipine Deep was dead, and could no longer be goaded.

In due course, a report was given to weather headquarters: "Computer Center shows no re-

cent data from Itself. It therefore seems as if another of the wartime anti-submarine water-weather robots has worn out. You may recall that these electronic monsters were programmed to suspicion, anger, and the idea that they owned part of the ocean. After the war, we could never get these creatures to surface; they were too suspicious of us."

The ocean of water, like the ocean of air far above, flowed and rolled and moved in a ceaseless, dynamic, driving motion many, many times more powerful, however, than any comparable air current. Yet, in essence, the quadrillions of water movements solely and only balanced each other out.

Through the Phillipine Deep there began presently to flow an enormous balancing river. It carried the aliens' invasion vessel in a long, slanting, upward direction. But several weeks passed before the drifting ship actually broke surface, and another day or two before it was seen.

A naval patrol boarded it, found the aliens dead more than a month from concussion, and — after examining the damage — correctly analyzed what had happened.

And so — a new king "woke" to the first "day" of his reign, and heard his Alter Ego say, "Well, Itself, what's the program?"

Itself glared with a royal suspicion.

During the years 1951 through 1956 more than two-dozen science fiction magazines printed the neatly-fashioned fantastic fiction of Charles E. Fritch, and he was often a cover name during this postwar sf boom. As the field diminished, he turned to other markets, and soon established himself solidly in the Men's Crime-Adventure field, turning out a dozen original paperbacks (including a biography of "Love Goddess" Kim Novak) and numerous stories — as well as editing his own line of publications. A graduate *cum laude* from Syracuse University in New York, he settled on the West Coast after the war (having served as an Army paratrooper with the 11th Airborne Division), taking special courses at UCLA. His hobby is photography at which he is quite accomplished, and he often lifts weights "just to see if I can develop muscles I haven't got." His latest novelette for GAMMA 1 reflects a nostalgic tongue-in-cheek approach to Space Opera, complete with flesh-eating plants, robot Android pseudo-humans, the baking death swamps of Venus, a tribe of crazed Frogmen and an intrepid, if somewhat bitter, hero with a Blaster at his hip. Yet Fritch also combines a taut Hemingwayesque flavor with a clever windup which contains more than one surprise. In the main, this story is Just Good Fun. We think you'll enjoy it.

## VENUS PLUS THREE

*Charles E. Fritch*

There are a lot of things a man has to watch out for on Venus — fungus growths, carnivorous plants, unfriendly frogmen. But the *women* are probably the worst. Not the native women; generally you can't tell them from their froggy husbands, and you'd have to be pretty far gone to want them. I'm talking about the women from Earth.

There aren't many of them, for

obvious reasons. An Earth girl wouldn't normally come to a lousy steaming hole like Venus. But some of them do. Maybe they come trying for a fast credit from the love-hungry prospectors; maybe they're kicked off Earth by a Sanitation Committee which figures they can't do any harm to a place like this. But whatever the reason, it's got to be a damn good one.

## CHARLES E. FRITCH

That's why I was surprised when Silvi McClair arrived.

I was waiting at the edge of the landing strip when the Earth rocket came down out of the clouds, blew gaseous flames at the ground, and settled its long prongs deep in the spongy field. I was expecting her husband, of course, but when Silvi stepped out of the hatch I wasn't disappointed.

She was beautiful. Earth make-up enhanced the effect, but that wouldn't last. Even under what passed for air-conditioning, the bodysweat—that's right, no euphemisms for it on Venus—would take it off in a minute and a half, and perhaps some of the skin might come right off with it, face-chemicals being what they are and Venus being what it is.

It was typical Venus weather when she arrived, because the planet hasn't any other kind. It's hot, steaming, like an open air Turkish bath, and the vapor of the air mixes with the sweat from your body, dribbles down your nose, mats your hair, stings your eyes. In seconds, fresh clothing is soaked. The best plastic rots. I was glad she had gotten a taste of this typical weather. If she were smart, she'd stay on the rocket and go back to sanitary, dry old Earth. But I half-wished she wouldn't.

She stepped off the rocket with her husband, George McClair. I'd heard of him someplace vaguely,

a botanist interested in exotic plants. Well, he'd find enough of them on Venus, all right—on the ground, in the air, in his sleeping bag, in his hair; in fact, he'd probably wake up sometime and find himself *inside* one of them if he wasn't careful, and generally the few tourists that came through didn't know enough to be.

Actually, I'd heard more about Silvi than about her husband. Where he was famous, she was infamous—in a high-type way, of course, the same way a rich man is eccentric and a poor one crazy. Her picture, posed intriguingly, was always good for a tabloid story designed to increase the circulation of both the paper and the male readers' blood. At least that was the hearsay in local saloons.

There was no doubt about it, though—she was beautiful, blonde, and built; you could tell that at a glance, but a glance was just an appetizer. Even the ugly fingers of Venus would have a hard time undoing this one, I thought. I wondered why she had come, why anyone in his right mind would come here, why anyone would stay as I had stayed these past five years enduring the heat and the dampness and the stinking plants and the nightmare animals.

They stood at the foot of the rocket, looking at the rolling Venus clouds that made up the sky, the swirls of heated vapor,

## VENUS PLUS THREE

the jungle with its shrill animal sounds, the flat, crude huts that were New Boston. Their gaze swept over and past me and the patiently waiting frogmen as if they didn't see us. They stood there as though hesitating, ready at any moment to plunge back into the rocket and return to Earth. It would have been the wisest move they could have made, even with the Android-Human squabbles that made the planet sickeningly hypocritical. Drops of sweat began to bead their foreheads, glistening in the diffused light filtering from above.

George McClair mopped his forehead. "My God, it's hot," he said.

I stepped up to him and asked a needless question. "Mr. McClair?" He nodded. "I'm Ray Bennet," I told him. "I got your radio message."

"Oh, yes, yes, Bennet. I heard you were the best guide on Venus, so I figured I'd better get you—especially since Silvi insisted on coming along. Oh, yes," motioning toward the blonde beside him. "Bennet, this is my wife."

"Glad to meet you, Mrs. McClair," I said, and I meant it.

She looked at me a bit strangely, at my brief plasticwool shorts, the tight jacket, the boots that were standard equipment on the planet. I had the feeling that she was dissecting me, putting me

back together again, this time clothed Earth style. It was an uncomfortable feeling.

"I hope you two don't object to Venus-type clothing," I said. "Earth clothing is hardly appropriate for our climate."

"So we're finding out," McClair said, mopping his forehead again. "Doesn't it ever get cool here?"

"Never. In fact, it gets worse. The result of being about thirty million miles closer to the sun."

The botanist glanced at his wife, looking concerned. "I wish Silvi — Mrs. McClair — hadn't come along. But she insisted —"

"Venus is no place for a woman," I volunteered. I marveled at how cool she seemed, though, despite the sudden heat to which she had been subjected. I tried to keep my inspection superficial.

"I'd like to go to a hotel, George," she said finally, in a liquid voice, "and freshen up." And to me: "Where is New Boston? Have you made arrangements for transportation?"

I grinned at her. "Mrs. McClair, you're standing right in New Boston, or at least the edge of it. That's the main section right over there, through that clump of vegetation. And as for transportation, nothing on Venus is as reliable as walking. Machinery has an obstinate tendency to break down at undesirable moments."

I had expected the shocked look that came to her face. "That—that is New Boston? Those *shacks* ever there? Why, it looks like something out of Old Africa."

Her husband shrugged, sighing, "I warned you it wouldn't be pleasant. You had friends on Earth, Silvi—"

"But I chose to come here instead, with you," the girl said. She and George exchanged glances. It should have been an exchange full of warmth, tenderness, something to fit the words, but it wasn't like that at all. Instead, McClair's look was one of puzzlement, hers of—I wasn't certain what.

"New Boston is primitive," I said, "according to the Earth standards you've been used to. But at least they do have a few conveniences. I've secured rooms for you at the hotel here."

"Fine," George said vaguely, as though he hadn't been listening. He was staring into the jungle stretching on all sides. "Is all of Venus like this? This hot, fetid jungle?"

"All I've seen of it. There are a few animals reminiscent of Earth's during the dinosaur age, but most life on Venus is plant."

George nodded. I glanced at Silvi. She was staring out at the forest walls and reacting to the sight. This would be much different from the *clean-scrubbed* gleaming buildings of Earth, the

skytop penthouses reaching for the stars, the cocktail parties stretching late into cool mornings.

I signaled the frogmen who swarmed about the rocket, unloading equipment brought by the McClairs. Boxes of equipment; other, personal effects. Plastic luggage which looked feminine, probably containing dainty clothing which would only last minutes in the Venusian atmosphere, little luxuries that would be useless here on the broiling planet.

"We'd better move along towards the village," I said. "The frogmen will handle your luggage. Don't worry; they're not civilized enough to steal."

"I say, Bennet," George McClair said suddenly, as we started toward the village, "you seem like a rather intelligent fellow. What in the world would a man like you want on Venus?"

"Perhaps Mr. Bennet is a philosopher," Silvi McClair suggested. "He probably came here to escape from something."

"All of us are trying to escape from something, Mrs. McClair."

I stared at her as I said that, and she returned the gaze for a brief nervous instant, then darted a glance at her sweating husband, then to the jungle. She didn't look too bad, I decided, despite the heat. Her Earth-slacks were now damp and clung to her tightly, as though the clothing had been

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painted on; the jacket, too.

"You'd better get into some fresh clothing as soon as you can," I suggested. "I put some in your rooms, in case you didn't bring any. It's made of a special plastic material that'll last longer than the regular stuff."

The ground underneath was the usual spongey matting of vegetation that covers most of Venus. Gravity is about the same as on Earth, but the vegetable flooring gives a queer springey sensation of lightness, especially when you're new at it. Silvi was having a little difficulty navigating with her high heels. Ahead of us the huts of New Boston danced and shimmered in rising heat currents.

We were a scant hundred yards from the takeoff spot when the rocket blasted off behind us. We turned to watch it, but it was already out of sight.

The botanist grinned ruefully at the smoking foliage and the trail of swirling vapor that followed the rocket's path. "Didn't waste much time." He mopped his forehead again, with a handkerchief that was already soaked. "Can't say I blame him much."

We plodded on. Silvi snagged a heel in the matting and went down to one knee. I made a movement to help her, but she came erect, brushing a wayward strand of damp hair into place.

"I told her she shouldn't have

come along, Bennet. I wanted her to stay behind, on Earth. This is no place for a woman."

"All right, all right!" Silvi snapped irritably. "If there's anything I hate it's somebody saying 'I told you so'. Besides, if I remember correctly you weren't so overjoyed at the prospect of having to leave me on Earth, where even your x-ray vision couldn't see which of your friends I was entertaining."

George McClair flushed. "Silvi, please."

The girl laughed, delighted at her husband's embarrassment. "What about you, Mr. Bennet, have you heard about my daring escapades? All the tele-tabloids have a field day with me."

"We don't get them here," I said honestly. "If we did, I might learn to like Venus a lot more."

"You sound as though you don't like Earth," Silvi said, as though this were impossible.

"I don't," I said simply. I thought about the Sanitary Codes, the persecution of the rising population of Androids, the hundreds of big and little things that made Earth something worse to me than Venus.

The jungle cleared away into the larger opening that nestled New Boston—a single unpaved street stretching perhaps a quarter of a mile, lined by square white plastic houses built on stilts above

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the damp ground. The frogmen hurried ahead of us, the luggage dragging behind them on sleds that slipped smoothly over the damp ground.

The McClairs were obviously disappointed with New Boston. But then, even the travel agencies don't try to push anyone off to Venus; they'd have too big a storm with dissatisfied customers. See the Martian Canal Resorts, go ice-skating on the rings of Saturn, have a Sunday picnic in the craters of the Moon. But Venus—uh-uh. These two knew what they were getting into.

That's what I told myself, but I wasn't sure I believed it. You can say heat to somebody and he'll think of the heat he's experienced, or dampness and he'll think of the dampness he's known — but not unless he's been to Venus would he really have an idea that you mean something worse than being boiled like a lobster. These two would never return to Venus once they made it back to Earth. *If* they made it back to Earth. But that was my job, seeing they got back safely. But I had the feeling that Silvi McClair was going to make that job a difficult one. I wondered why she'd come; it certainly wasn't any great love for her husband.

"The hotel's the only two-storied building there," I pointed out. "They didn't think the slim tourist trade would warrant their putting

up a sign, so they didn't."

"I'd like to get started right away, Bennet," the botanist said.

"Suits me. I've got all the equipment ready."

"I want to get it over with as soon as possible," he said staring at the bright clouds overhead, "before this damned heat gets me. We'll see you in a few minutes."

I nodded, and watched them go up the steps into the hotel. I did have everything ready, so I just waited there in the street. No one was in sight. Venus weather isn't conducive to much exercise.

About ten minutes later Silvi came down into the street. She was dressed in shorts and halter, and she looked every bit as good as I had anticipated. Better, if that's possible. She had her hair pulled straight and caught behind her neck, leaving the rest in what has been called everything from a pony tail to a jet flare. On her, it looked good. On her, everything looked good.

"That was quick."

"Why not? It's just as bad in there as it is out here."

"It seems so, at first, because even the so-called cool spots are hot. Where's Geo — er, Mr. McClair?"

"He's still in his room, moaning about the heat. I like to be more practical."

"That helps."

She stared at me. "Do you, Mr.

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Bennet? Like being practical, I mean?"

"Sometimes. Have you anything special in mind?"

"Perhaps. I'd like to speak to you about it later . . ."

George McClair came out of the hotel and puffed down the stairs to us, mopping sweat from his face. The brief Venus costume revealed the flabbiness of a body nurtured by Earth culture. From the corner of my eye, I saw Silvi cast him a disparaging glance.

"My God, it's hot," George McClair said. "Listen, Bennet, do we have to *walk* through the jungle, too; I thought they used 'copters on Venus."

"They do. But from the airport to New Boston is only a few hundred yards and the depreciation on the machines would be greater than any convenience in using them. Machinery doesn't last long here."

"Neither do some humans, from what I hear," Silvi put in.

"It's no picnic," I admitted. "There are a million and one ways to get killed in the jungle — carnivorous plants, wild animals, unfriendly frogmen."

"Sounds delightful," Silvi said. "Don't you think so, George?"

"I think it's criminal," George said, obviously irritated, "sending me out to a hell-hole like this to gather a few stupid plants nobody's really interested in. I'm be-

ginning to wish we'd gone back with the rocket."

"Of course, if you're afraid," Silvi's eyes flashed grim contempt, "Mr. Bennet and I could gather your flowers for you, while you sit here at the hotel in the shade and sip mint-julips. Would that be more to your taste?"

George McClair flushed. "Look here, Silvi—" he began.

"While I enjoy listening to family spats," I interrupted, as gently as possible, "I do think we'd better be starting off. You haven't told me what plants you're after."

The botanist fished into a briefcase and pulled out several full-color sketches, which he handed to me. I looked at the first and whistled.

"What's the matter, don't you know where that is?"

"We won't have any trouble finding this one; it's getting away from it that's going to be the big job," I told him. "This particular specimen's a flesh-eater, and it's not overly concerned whether the flesh comes from a Venus animal or an Earthman."

George McClair had a sour look on his face. "How about the others?"

I shuffled through the sketches, handed them back to him. "Ordinarily, a man would be a damn fool to go near any one of them," I said frankly. "Whoever gave you this assignment either doesn't care

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much for your health and well-being, or he doesn't know much about Venus."

"Carey said it was dull routine," McClair complained. "He certainly wouldn't put me in a position of danger purposely. You know him, Silvi."

Silvi nodded. "Willard Carey is a spineless jellyfish who lacks the courage of his own convictions."

I shrugged. "Sometimes even your best friends won't tell you."

McCair frowned. He said to Silvi, "I thought you liked Willard." Then, quickly, as though that brought unpleasant thoughts, "Well, no matter. Let's get on with it."

"Right." I turned to Silvi. "Sure you want to come along?"

"Look, Mr. Bennet. I thought I made myself quite clear. I—"

"Okay, okay. Just thought I'd ask, is all. The 'copter's loaded with all the equipment we'll probably need. It's garaged over here."

I led the way behind the hotel, to a plastibrick 'copter garage, and opened the door by spinning the correct numbers on the combi-lock. It was an old 'copter, reconditioned to withstand the hot wetness of Venus. Even so, its life expectancy was short. As the door opened, a blast of air sucked inward.

"My God," George McClair said, "what was that?"

"Sorry. Forgot to warn you. We

keep 'copters and other machinery in a vacuum to retard rust and corrosion."

"It gave me a start," McClair said. "Thought at first it was the wave of a Proton cannon."

"George was a hero in the Earth-Mars war," Silvi explained acidly.

George flushed once more. I got the idea quite clearly that this was nothing new to him. "Silvi, please," he said, meekly.

"All aboard," I suggested.

Silently, they clambered up the steps of the 'copter, Silvi seating herself in the back, George climbing into the front seat. I got in, revved the motors into life. The vanes whirled overhead, driven by blasting rockets attached to them, and the 'copter rose slowly. The roof opened automatically, and the 'copter leaped like a giant grasshopper towards the turbulent clouds.

I leveled off at several hundred feet, and we flew silently across the strip of land that was New Boston. The terrain below quickly gave way to jungle. The heat swirled and eddied, rocking the 'copter in a giant's hand. George gripped the guardrail and leaned to look at the vegetation below. I noticed Silvi watching her husband with purposeful eyes.

"There's a clearing a couple miles from here," I shouted to the botanist above the roar of the

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'copter vanes. "We can pitch camp there, use it as a base of operations."

He nodded. I stole another glance at Silvi, and found she was still staring intently at her husband. Suddenly, she glanced up and I caught a trace of amusement in those deep black eyes.

She had removed her makeup, and was still beautiful without it. It's not often you get to see a woman like that, especially on Venus. George was a lucky fellow, I decided. Then I gave the statement a second thought and wasn't as certain.

I pointed down. "That's where we're heading. That clear spot. You can probably pick up all or most of your specimens within a few hundred yards." I hoped so. I wasn't in the mood for any extended plant wrestling.

Gently, I lowered the 'copter towards the clearing, settling it among foliage growing thickly on all sides. The clearing was only about the size of an average house, but I felt it was adequate. When the rotors stopped churning, I said, "We can make camp here. I brought along three duo-plastic tents; the two walls act as both insulation and protection."

George nodded abstractedly, his head cocked as though listening for sounds from the jungle around us. He stepped down from the machine, tested the ground ginger-

ly with his feet, then turned to help his wife.

"Don't try to be a boy scout," she said; "I can get out by myself."

George glared at her.

I said, "I'd better warn you right at the start to stay away from any plants around here; there's more to fear from them than from any animals we might find. That one at the edge of the jungle there, that's an example of what I mean."

"It—it looks like a giant fly-trap," George said, "but big enough to hold a man."

I nodded. "It's carnivorous and feeds on small animals unlucky enough to pass near it. But it's perfectly willing to try and digest a man—or a woman—and it probably could in time."

George regarded the plant seriously, but Silvi seemed completely bored with my warning. I managed to overcome an impulse to shove her into the mantrap to prove my remarks; nothing serious; I'd just allow the leaves to fold around her and let her know I wasn't kidding. But instead I got busy setting up the camp.

We wrapped a plastic covering about the 'copter, designed to keep out most of the wetness, then set off the gas cylinders that blew up the double-layered globe-shaped tents, three of them. I figured three might prevent a couple of arguments and get the job done a lot faster.

"Now what?" George wondered. He sat down puffing, mopping his forehead, staring into the thick mass of vegetation on all sides.

"Now we go after your specimens," I told him. "Machete and flame pistol are standard equipment of course, and I packed some anesthesia bombs."

"Some what?"

"Anesthesia bombs, to knock out plants that might be dangerous," I explained, "like this man-eater you're supposed to bring back alive. They're small grenades no bigger than a capsule that release a gas paralyzing plant life." I took one from my jacket and showed it to him. "You don't know much about Venus, do you?"

"No," he said. "No, I guess I don't."

We strapped on the necessary equipment and were ready to leave when I noticed Silvi wasn't around.

"Where's Sil—er, Mrs. McClair?"

The botanist looked around, a little wildly. "I don't know," he said, disturbed. "She was right here a minute ago."

"Don't get in an uproar," Silvi said, appearing suddenly at the jungle's edge. "I was just looking around. I can take care of myself, and it's none of your business what I do anyway."

"But it is *my* business," I broke in, "and I'll have to ask you to stay either in your tent or where we can see you."

She turned on me angrily. "And just what makes you think you can boss me around."

"Interplanetary law," I said. "As a guide, I have control over this little picnic, and I refuse to have any lives jeopardized because somebody has the wanderlust."

She muttered an unladylike expression and stamped into her tent.

"Sorry I had to say that," I told McClair.

"I should have said it," he said. "Trouble is, I love her too much, I guess, and I suppose I always will." He stared at the ground for a moment. "Well, let's get after these plants."

I led the way into the jungle, pushing and hacking at heavy vines. There aren't any real trails, although animals and frogmen do wear an occasional path of sorts through the vegetation, but nothing a human can really follow.

Flame pistol in my left hand, I hacked away at the tangled vines with the machete in my right — when I heard a choked cry.

"Bennet! B-Ben—net!"

I turned and blasted in the same movement. A length of greenish vine was curled about McClair's throat in a tight grasp. The part that extended from somewhere in the jungle smoked and charred in the flame from my pistol, then broke off, streaming a pale liquid. McClair went down to his knees,

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hands clutched at his throat. I knelt beside him, clawed off the vine, threw its writhing length into the bushes.

The botanist's eyes were watery. He shook his head dazedly, hands massaging his raw throat.

"That was a tendril from one of your unpotted plants," I told him.

"That?" he said incredulously. "Carey expects me to bring *that* back?"

"Evidently. The plant has about a dozen tendrils, each one as lively as the one that snagged you. All we have to do is sneak in close enough to it to paralyze the center. Then you can take it back to Earth with you and plant the thing on your front lawn—if they still have front lawns on Earth."

McClair struggled erect; he was still shaken from his experience. "I can't understand it. Carey said nothing about any dangers involved. Just go to Venus and bring back a few plants for the University. I never realized—"

"Does your wife know Carey well?"

"Of course. They're old friends. But—" His eyes narrowed. "What are you driving at?"

"Just thinking deep, dark thoughts," I told him.

"Now look, Bennet," he said, his tone unsteady, "Silvi and I have our squabbles, all right, plenty of them. But if you're insinuating—"

"Take it easy, McClair. We've

got enough things to fight in this jungle, without fighting among ourselves. Shall we go after your plant?"

He sighed. "I suppose so. Say, it's starting to rain."

I felt a warm splash on my forehead even as he said it. "We'd better get back to the tents."

"It's only rain," he said. "Maybe it'll cool things off."

"This is *Venus* rain. It comes down thick enough to drown a man if he's out in it for long. And sometimes the temperature of the stuff goes up like crazy until it's practically boiling. I saw a prospector once who was caught out during a hot rain. It wasn't pleasant."

That convinced him, and we hurried, stumbling, splashing in the suddenly wet matting, back to the tents. "Don't come out until it's over," I told him, as he dove toward his tent. I threw a hurried glance at Silvi's, hoping she was in there.

She wasn't. She was in mine, sitting on the cot.

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you," she said.

"Wait in your own tent." I went to the inner flap, opened it, felt the beating steaming heat of the rain on the outside cover. "Too late."

"I wouldn't have gone anyway," she said. "Remember, I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Yeah, I remember. Okay, talk."

She patted the area of cot beside her. "Sit down. I won't bite you."

"I'm not so sure about that."

My eyes roamed along her smooth limbs, lingered in the lithe curves of a body obvious in its slim covering. She seemed too perfect to be human. I thought about all I'd heard of Silvi, her reputation for being "unconventional," and of what a perfect setup this was, with her husband trapped in his bubbletent, unable to eavesdrop. I sat down beside her.

"Don't get ideas," she warned. "This is a business proposition."

"I wouldn't doubt it."

She ignored the meaning. "I was amused by your reference to interplanetary law."

"You didn't act particularly amused."

"I was angry. I'm not any more. You see, Mr. *Bennet*, I did a little checking before George and I left home. Earth records are pretty complete, you know; they have to be to prevent *Androids* from crossing and trying to pass as *Humans*. By putting two and two together, you can even trace a man who has changed his name."

It was hot in the tent, but suddenly I felt cold. "So?" I tried to be calm, but my clenched hand shook.

"So, I'd like a little cooperation from you, in return for a little silence from me."

Even beneath the second layer of the plastic tent, I could feel the rain beating its steady, unrelenting melody. "What kind of cooperation?" I said finally.

"George and I have never gotten along," she said. "That's common knowledge. But a divorce has—er—certain inconveniences; for example, insurance beneficiaries can be changed. Therefore, a more agreeable method of separation is necessary."

"Did you arrange with Carey to have your husband sent here?"

She grimaced. "Will Carey is a weak-kneed idiot, afraid to face his own shadow. But he is influential, and he does like me—and he can be persuaded to be cooperative."

"And," I finished for her, "you came along to see that the job went off as planned."

"You're very clever, Mr. — er — *Bennet*. And being so clever, you'll see the wisdom of doing as I say."

"Will I now?" I got up, paced briefly. I turned to her, smiling. "There's one little aspect you apparently haven't considered."

She looked up at me, puzzled, perhaps a little fearful I might be right.

"You're placing too much confidence in your good looks. You want me to help you murder your husband. But *you're* the one who knows about me, not George. Logically, if I were to kill someone, the

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one to kill would be *you*, Silvi."

There was a look of sudden horror on her face. "You—you wouldn't." Her hand went prematurely to her throat.

I smiled as unpleasantly as possible, and Silvi leaped up, glancing nervously toward the tent flap, gauging the distance, the steady beat of the rain outside.

"It's probably scalding out there," I said casually, "but you're lucky, in a way. Not many people have their choice like this. Well, what'll it be, Silvi—or would you like to call it a day and go back to Earth like a good little girl?"

Her features relaxed at that. "Just as I thought," she said contemptuously, "you're bluffing."

"I always was a poor liar," I confessed.

"Suppose George were to find us in here together. He's violently jealous. If I gave him the idea you were attacking me—"

"There's a little matter of a very hot rain between this tent and his. I'm afraid he might not make it here." And then, even as I said it, I realized my mistake, for her eyes brightened at the thought.

Silvi screamed. It was a good scream, loud and clear. I tried to stop her and failed.

For a moment, silence. Then, George McClair's voice cried out, "Silvi, Silvi!" A sudden scream of pain an bewilderment, and then nothing but the steady, ceaseless

beat of the hot steaming rain. Silvi was smiling.

I sat down on the edge of the cot, weakly. "He loved you."

"A lot of men have," she said unashamedly, "and probably a lot more will."

I didn't answer that. I just sat there on the cot, listening to the tapping rain. Inside the protective bubble of the tent it was warm and reasonably dry, with chemicals in wall packets, silently absorbing moisture. I tried not to think about the body of George McClair outside, sprawled a few feet from his tent, the boiling rain playing silently across him.

Silvi sat down beside me, and I felt her arm across my back. "Look, Ray," she said gently. "It's all over now. George is dead, and it was an accident. You and I could go back to Earth together."

"A very convenient accident."

"An accident, nevertheless. Who's to prove otherwise?"

I realized what was happening; Silvi was soft soaping me because I was potentially dangerous to her. Once we got ot Earth, she'd turn me in to the authorities and then have a clear field. But even if she meant it, I wouldn't go back. My sense of ethics had gotten a big kick in the teeth during the Android purges.

"The rain's letting up," I said. "I'm taking you back to New Boston. The authorities may have a

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few ideas of their own about your husband's 'accident'."

I turned from the tent flap to face the muzzle of a flame pistol.

"You'd better save that for someone who needs it."

"At the moment," she said, smiling grimly, "I can't think of anyone on this filthy, stinking planet that deserves this more than you."

"You may change your mind," I told her calmly. "We're surrounded by frogmen."

Her smile faltered. "Wha — what?"

"Just take a look out there. Being natives of Venus, they can stand the hot rains a lot better than we can. There's a whole congregation of them out there, armed to the gills."

"But you said they're friendly."

"The ones around New Boston are. The others, like these, don't approve of Earthmen."

"What — what about Earth-women?" She averted her gaze when she said it.

"If you mean what I think you mean, you don't have to worry about your honor — if you have any left." She gave me a withering glance at that. "You're probably as repulsive to them as they are to you. I know a little of the language; maybe I can get them to leave us alone."

"And if you can't?"

I shrugged. I'd heard about things the frogmen did to Earth

prisoners, but I hadn't thought about it much, until now. I began thinking about it. The rain had stopped, and we could plainly hear the croakings of the natives outside—angry, impatient sounds.

"Wait here," I told Silvi. "I'll see what the score is," and she nodded mumbly, pale with fear.

I moved to the tent flap, raised it carefully, went out among the slow dripping ferns of the jungle. The frogmen, green and glistening damply, muttered and clashed their spears. Slowly I raised my arms in a gesture denoting peace, knowing the same movement would show I carried no weapons. These natives were like the others physically, but psychologically their makeup was much different. They resented the coming of the Earthmen, and I couldn't blame them for that.

A large frogman came forward, spear poised, and I spoke to him in the few words I had learned, saying we were friends, that we came here on a peaceful mission. The language is hardly a language at all, being mostly croaking, grunting sounds, but he understood me. He grunted in disbelief and motioned me away from the tent flap.

"Silvi," I called. "Come out unarmed. These boys mean business."

I heard a commotion and looked up to see a frogman brandish his spear. I saw Silvi dart from behind

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the tent where she had slit an opening. The frogman was poised, arm in throwing position, when I sprang forward, slamming into him. We went down on the damp matting of the ground, a bundle of thrashing arms and legs. He was slippery but I managed to get on top for a moment. It was in that moment that something hard struck me on the back of the head. Then — darkness.

After that came the vague sensations of being half-carried, half-dragged through the jungle.

I awoke in a hut made of vines and leaves. The only light drifted through an open doorway where a husky frogman was on guard. I looked about the hut, blinking, trying to accustom my eyes to the gloom. My head hurt.

"Feeling better?" Silvi asked, sitting beside me.

"Yeah," I lied. I sat up and felt a lump swelling at the base of my neck. "You okay?"

"I'm okay," she said. She didn't look at me. "Why did you try to save me?"

I shrugged. "Just trying to be a boy scout, I guess. Anyway, right now we've got to figure a way to get out of here."

"Ray," she said, hesitantly, "about George . . ."

"What about him?"

"He was an Android," she said.

I stared at her. "That's impossible. You couldn't have married

him, unless—"

She shook her head. "Earth has changed in the five years you've been away. The Androids have reached equal status with the Humans now. The politicians are turning themselves inside out for the Android, trying to get their votes."

"The same old Earth," I mused. "First they try to stamp out the Androids, then they cater to them. If you can't fight 'em, join 'em."

We were interrupted by a shadow in the doorway. A frogman spoke in harsh grunts for a few seconds, then disappeared.

"What did he want?" Silvi asked.

"It seems we're just in time to be guests at a ritual for their plant-god."

Silvi was suddenly wide-eyed. "What do you mean — guests?"

"Okay then, sacrifices. They worship a man-eating plant, which seems reasonable considering the environment. They figure that if they make regular sacrifices to the plant-god, the members of their tribes can pass unharmed through the jungle."

She was silent for a long time. I wondered if she were going to cry or perhaps get hysterical. Somehow, she didn't seem the type for either, but then she'd never been in circumstances quite like these. She merely stared at the leaf-walls surrounding us. Through the open doorway came the beginning

sounds of a religious chant.

"Haven't we a chance?" she said finally.

"Only one. I don't know how these natives are going to react to it, but we'll soon find out."

She started a question, but two frogmen came in and hauled us to our feet, then shoved us through the narrow doorway. I blinked at the sudden fierce light coming through the clouds. Huts were arranged in a huge circle which had been cleared away, and in the center of the circle was a huge plant, its center bulbous, with a gaping red mouth, and twelve tentacles writhing in all directions, as though in rhythm with the chant of the frogmen.

"This is really ironic," I grimaced. "That's one of the plants your friend Carey wanted us to get. It looks like it's going to be the other way around."

At that moment, Silvi fainted. It was probably just as well. I started to help her, but a frogman's spear barred my way, and I was shoved roughly toward the reaching tentacles of the plant-god. The chanting increased in tempo. Vaguely, my mind translated the words asking the plant-god for mercy, offering this sacrifice to it in recognition of its omnipotence. They believed it was all-powerful, incapable of destruction. Suppose it were proved otherwise. Suppose—

Another shove and I fell for-

ward. Before I could get up, I felt the slimy coils of a tentacle around my waist, squeezing the breath from me.

I was lifted, gasping, into the air. A cheer went up from the frogmen. My mind whirled dizzily at the pressure. Frantically I felt for the capsule in my jacket. I saw the plant loom large in my vision, saw the gaping red mouth . . .

I hurled the anesthesia bomb, saw it explode with a small puff that enveloped the plant. The tendrils shuddered, thrashed, then dropped. I fell to the ground, quickly peeled away the plant-tentacle, and strove to stand erect, feeling as though every bone in my body had been crushed. I became conscious of a great silence.

The frogmen were standing in silent disbelief, staring at their unmoving plant-god.

Overhead, a sudden roar broke into the silence. I looked up. A 'copter was descending toward the village. For a moment the frogmen stared at it, then with wild cries they ran into the jungle.

Silvi was still unconscious. I picked her up, carried her to the landing 'copter. I nearly dropped her when I saw who the pilot was.

"McClair!"

He got out of the seat, sweating but looking reasonably alive.

"But I thought—"

"—that I was dead?" he finished. "I nearly was. When I heard Silvi

## VENUS PLUS THREE

scream, I grabbed a machete and dashed out into the rain, forgetting what you'd said about it. In the downpour, I couldn't see where I was going." He laughed grimly. "I must have staggered right into that mantrap you warned me about. A good thing, too. The leaves closed over me, and by the time I'd hacked my way out, the rain had stopped. I saw you and Silvi being dragged off by the frogmen, and I followed in the 'copter."

"And you were never more welcome," I told him. "C'mon, let's get out of here. The natives may come back."

"Right, but first I'm going to do something."

McClair took a long metal rope which he had fastened to the underside of the 'copter and went to the head of the paralyzed plant-god and wrapped the end of the rope securely around the plant. I looked at him, puzzled.

"I'm going to take this back to Earth with me and personally dump it on Willard Carey's desk," he explained.

I had to grin at that. "You'd better stay with the controls," I told him. "I still feel a little shaky."

The 'copter rose, taking up the slack on the metal rope. A sudden burst of power, and the plant sucked loose and floated silently beneath us, tendrils waving limply in the air currents. Beside me,

McClair breathed a sigh of relief. Silvi was still unconscious in the back seat. Below us, the jungle thickened again.

"Silvi told me you're an Android," I said.

He didn't look at me. "That's right," he said, as calmly as though I'd just asked him if his eyes were blue. Then: "Oh, I forgot, you've been away from Earth." He smiled. "Androids are quite acceptable these days. Silvi's one, too, you know?"

I looked at him in amazement. "Silvi, too?"

"Didn't she tell you? I imagine she decided to enlist your sympathy by telling you *I* was one, figuring you, as a Human, might still be against Androids. Are you, by the way?"

I shook my head. "No," I told him. "No, I think Androids are here to stay."

I was thinking about a certain accident five years ago on Earth, an accident that could easily be made to look like a murder if an Android were known to have been involved. A change of clothing, a change of name, and Ray Bennet, "Human," left for Venus.

But now George said the Androids were not being discriminated against. Now there could be a fair trial.

"When the next rocket comes," I said, slowly, "I'm going back with you."

## CHARLES E. FRITCH

I looked down at the yellow-green vegetation stretching to the horizon in all directions, and for the first time in a long while felt the searing heat filtering through the clouds, the sweat that poured from my body and soaked my

clothes. For the first time in a long while I smelled the sickly living smell of the plants. Five years was a long time.

It would be good, seeing Earth again.



Watch for GAMMA 2, with: FAULKNER, HEMINGWAY, BRADBURY, SHECKLEY, MATHESON, FINNEY, BLOCH, BEAUMONT, JACKSON and SHAKESPEARE!

A couple of seasons ago, heeding Hollywood's siren call, native Chicagoan Ray Russell moved from the Windy City to Beverly Hills, where he now resides as an active screen writer. During his seven year editorial tenure at *Playboy* (having been instrumental in building this fabulously-successful publication from its earliest issues in 1954), Russell was always receptive to science fiction, and brought many sf "names" to the attention of his own distinctive fiction. Ray's startling Gothic novella, *Sardonicus*, was recently collected (with several of his short stories) in a popular volume from Ballantine — and his striking novel of modern diabolism, *The Case Against Satan*, which was published last year, has already been optioned for films. He has been represented no less than eight times in Judith Merril's annual "Best SF" series (three stories reprinted, five Honorable Mentioned — under his own name and *noms de plume*). Russell studied at the Chicago Conservatory of Music and later at the Goodman Theatre, acting in various stock companies throughout the U.S. Now the ebullient ex-actor ex-editor has completed his first play (also optioned) and says he is "beard-deep into my second novel." His fresh-off-the-keys story for GAMMA 1 is typically Russellian in its compactness, its tint of satire, its element of surprise and, yes, its "message."

\*

## A MESSAGE FROM MORJ

*Ray Russell*

They watched it all through the wall, all three of them peering anxiously through the sun-filtering wall of transparent metal at the landing of the ship outside, a landing graceful, despite the vessel's giant mass. The statesman said, "It's late." The general merely grunted. The priest said, "We must give thanks."

"Thanks?" said the general. "Let's hear what the Morjian messages mean before we give thanks. We may have little to be thankful for."

"Surely a safe return from the planet Morj is sufficient cause—" the priest began.

"My friends," the statesman said, smoothly, "I suggest we com-

pose ourselves and meet our intrepid scout in an atmosphere of unity, of concord . . .”

“I agree, of course,” said the priest; but the general merely grunted again.

Not long after that, the scout, still in his space gear, was ushered into the room. He was young, strong, dedicated, and trained within an inch of his life. “My friend,” said the statesman. “My boy,” said the general. “My son, said the priest. Then, begging each other’s pardons, they decided to let the scout speak first.

He did, in clipped military cadences. “Chief Scout Morj Expedition reporting, sirs. Crew all present and in good health, ship in prime condition—”

“Yes, yes,” said the statesman, “but the *messages*. What of them?”

“Sir,” said the scout, “is this report being recorded?”

“Of course,” said the statesman, waving towards a discreetly but not furtively disguised microphone in the ceiling.

“Then, sir, for the purposes of accuracy — just for the record, you know — I would rather refer to the messages as simply ‘phenomena’ or ‘occurrences’ or something like that.”

“Why?” snapped the general.

“Because they weren’t messages, sir,” said the scout.

“Not messages?” said the priest. “Those periodic flashings of light

and cracklings of the ether, at precisely regulated intervals? If they were not an attempt by the inhabitants of Morj to communicate with us across the gulf of space, then what in the Divine Name were they?”

“Explosions, sir.”

“Explosions!” exploded the general. “No explosion would be visible from this distance, even with our powerful telescopes . . .”

“They were nuclear explosions, sir, of uncountable megatons.”

“But the regularity of them!” said the priest.

“And why is your return overdue?” demanded the statesman.

Turning to answer the priest first, the scout said, “The regularity, sir, was caused by the fact that the explosions were controlled by machines — intricate, almost thinking machines that reacted to pre-determined stimuli and aimed and fired enormous nuclear missiles across the face of the planet.” Turning to the statesman, he said, “The reason we overstayed our time, sir, is that we were trying to make contact with the inhabitants . . . and . . .”

“And?”

“Sir,” the scout said hesitantly, fearing he would meet with disbelief, “we found part of one city left; we found some records, visual and aural; we found the skeletal remains of intelligent life; but the inhabitants of Morj — well, sir,

## A MESSAGE FROM MORJ

they were all dead."

"Dead . . ." whispered the priest.

"Yes, sir. Our archaeological officer estimated they died eons ago. Only the machines are still alive, always on the alert, ready to go into action at the slightest stimulus. I respectfully submit that they were set off by a chance meteorite striking Arrdth . . ."

"Striking *what*?" asked the general.

"Their own name for their planet," said the scout. "We heard it in the aural records. Arrdth, Errdth, a word like that . . ."

An awkward moment passed. The statesman said, tonelessly, "Not messages . . ." The priest said, "Not messages? Oh, I wouldn't exactly say that . . ." He turned slowly to the general, who merely grunted; but if a grunt can be hollow, his was.



WATCH FOR A "NEW" SCIENCE  
FICTION STORY BY MR. WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE IN GAMMA 2.

Versatility is the keynote in the work of William F. Nolan. Over the past nine years, writing for nearly a hundred markets, he has sold (under his own name and seven pseudonyms) articles, biographies, travel sketches, personality profiles, book reviews, comic strips, motion picture treatments, editorial copy, road race reports, television scripts, bibliographies, film columns — and some three-dozen short stories, half in the science fiction/fantasy field. Nolan's work has appeared in several anthologies, most notably in the high school text, *Adventures for Americans* and in Ballantine's *The Fiend In You*. Based on the publication of his fourth book, *Phil Hill: Yankee Champion*, he was recently selected for inclusion in a forthcoming volume of *Contemporary Authors*, a library guide to currently-popular writers. He'll have three new books out in 1963, including a collection of his best short fiction (with an Introduction by Ray Bradbury). A transplanted Missourian now living on the West Coast, Nolan attended the Kansas City Art Institute and seemed headed for a career in commercial art until he sold his first short story to *If* early in 1954. He switched to a full time job at the typewriter in '56, quickly earning a reputation as one of the nation's top automotive writers. Nolan claims his bachelor status enables him to "write what I want, when and where I want." A knowledgeable student and collector of the modern short story, he has amassed over 600 volumes in his personal library, and readily admits that his greatest satisfaction as a writer is achieved in turning out successful short fiction. Nolan's latest story is eminently successful, dealing with the social adjustment of a returning veteran and offering a unique futuristic solution to this ageless problem.

## TO SERVE THE SHIP

*William F. Nolan*

He entered the dim chamber, pausing just inside, his back pressed against the door. In the soft semi-darkness the room smelled of

iron and aluminum and brass. Ahead of him, dials glowed faintly. Lord, but this is fine, he thought, breathing deeply, hands clenched.

## TO SERVE THE SHIP

He closed his eyes in the warm familiar dark, thinking, this is where I belong; here I am complete:

Norman Jerome Hollander, Servant of the Ship.

He opened his eyes, pupils adjusting to the dimness. Across the length of the chamber, a rising wall of tiny multi-colored lights winked and gleamed; needles steadied at correct pressure levels; round dial faces hummed softly, regulating the vast power of the Ship, guiding it through space toward —

Norman Hollander swore, knuckling his forehead with a clenched fist. He didn't want to think about the Ship's destination. It seemed so grossly unfair, but then he imagined that was how it must seem to *all* the Servants at such a time. Each thinking the same sad thoughts, each cursing the impersonal machine which had passed its irrevocable judgment.

He moved slowly toward the glowing panel and lowered himself into the cushioning depth of the control chair. Around him he savored the immense breathing presence of the Ship, its muted atomics, deep-buried in their ribbed and layered metal tons, sending out an almost imperceptible vibration which trembled along each nerve and muscle of Norman Hollander's body. In front of him, insect dials whirred, wheels spun,

clicked; wires sang. The Ship was alive, but he was no longer a part of her life. He was now simply a passenger on the way to a destination he hated to reach.

Hollander sighed, removing the slotted metal card from his uniform pocket. He didn't need any light to read the words; they were graven on his brain. He would always remember them:

June 29, 2163  
OUTCOME OF TEST  
L176C. OPERATIONAL  
STATUS: NEGATIVE.

The silver needles had entered his veins. Electronic devices had measured his heartbeat, his hearing, his blood pressure. His reaction time was checked, his entire body combed for the slightest imperfection. And, finally, that imperfection had been found, the verdict rendered. Negative. The one word which he'd been dreading, the one word which meant that his job was over, that he was no longer a part of the Ship, could no longer serve her. For 85 years, while she hovered in space, suspended above alien planets, mining the rich ores from a thousand strange worlds, Norman Hollander had lovingly guided her efforts. His human hand had moved her delicate metal spider-hands which probed the surfaces of those far-flung worlds for storable riches. She was a 90-year Ship, designed

## WILLIAM F. NOLAN

and built to remain in space for nine full decades while her great storage compartments were gradually filled. Then, and only then, would she come home. Unless . . .

Unless her Servant fails a test, thought Norman Hollander. Unless she finds her Servant wanting, imperfect. Then she rejects him, takes him back to Earth.

Hollander was 102, barely middle-aged by current Earth standards, but old for space. Ideally, though, he should have been able to remain with the Ship for those last five precious years. But human weakness had cheated him of this. Hollander leaned forward, peering at his own reflection in the circular dial to his right. Not an old face. A strong face, marked with duty, but not old. Science had kept him young — but even the wonders of science could not make him perfect, as the Ship was perfect. And so she was taking him home.

No, not home, he thought bitterly. My home is here, with the Ship; I was born and bred for this and nothing else. Earth is simply a place, faintly-remembered, which I'll reach in 48 hours — after all these years as strange as any world I've ever visited. No, not home.

"When is he due?" asked Dr. Burack.

His assistant, David Miller, placed the schedule on Burack's

desk. "Tomorrow morning," Miller said.

Burack looked at the schedule. Then he met Miller's cool gaze. "I hope to God we have some luck with this one," he said. "Are your men posted?"

Miller nodded. "He'll be observed from the moment the Ship touches down. Personally, I'm not optimistic. The pattern seems fixed."

Dr. Burack tapped one finger gently against the schedule. "Patterns can be broken. That's the biggest part of our job. I want the usual hourly report on Hollander. We've got a lot to learn yet, but we may be getting closer to a solution. This time, David, we *may* win."

"I sure wouldn't count on it, sir," said David Miller.

Lying on his side in the bed, Hollander stared out at the stars pricking the dark night sky beyond his window. The stars were telling him that he should be up there with them, that he had no business on this world called Earth. The stars understood him. No one here, on this stifling planet, understood him. No one.

Oh, they'd tried to make him feel at home. He was given this modern house, equipped with every electronic comfort; the latest Jetcar waited in the garage; a full wardrobe of clothes had been pro-

## TO SERVE THE SHIP

vided — all gifts for his service from a grateful government. They gave him everything except the chance to go back.

His family also tried. They had done all they possibly could to assure him that he was wanted, welcome, that he was now a part of their society once again, that he belonged. Yet his parents were strangers to him. He'd been a boy of fifteen when he'd seen them last; now they were smiling, friendly strangers, and he found nothing of himself in them.

From the moment his feet touched Earth he had begun to hate.

He hated the crowds shouting at him; he hated this house, the car, the clothes . . . He even found himself hating his mother and father. They were part of the society which had taken him from space. He felt trapped and betrayed by all these smiling people, the men and women who shook his hand, who told him how heroic he was, how noble he had been, serving alone "out there" for all those years. They gave him medals; they made speeches about him and, through it all, he had wanted to damn them, to loose his hatred for what they had done to him.

Hollander often wondered about the Servants who had landed before him. Dozens of them, at the very least. Yet no one seemed to

know anything about them; no records existed to prove that any of them had ever come back. Was he, in fact, the only man to have survived the Ships? When he asked questions about other Servants his inquiries were shrugged aside. No, they told him, there *were* no others. He had questioned his parents, but they said they knew nothing about the Servants. In their denials, however, Hollander had detected a guilt, an uneasiness.

The first month had been hell.

Five days after his homecoming he'd knocked down a man in the street. The man had made an insulting remark about the Ships and those who served them. He could still hear the fellow's mocking voice: "*You have to be insane to stay out there all that time on those damned tubs. You have to be crazy to do a thing like that!*" And Norman Hollander had knocked him to the street. If he hadn't been pulled away, he might have throttled the man.

The fool! Hollander could feel the angry heat rising in his body.

During the second week he'd gone to the Psyc Center and allowed the machines to put him through analysis. Adjust, they advised him. Learn to adjust to your society. But Norman Hollander had rejected them, as their Ship had rejected him.

In the third week he had at-

tacked a Lawman. Only his status as a retired Servant had kept him from severe punishment.

I had my reasons, Hollander recalled. When I asked him why there were no other Servants he had smiled like some kind of sly cat — and I wanted to smash that smile, destroy it.

And last week; that had been the worst. He drank for an entire morning, then took out the car. The afternoon had ended in near-disaster when a schoolgirl had crossed the traffic strip ahead of him and he hadn't seen her. In missing her, he crashed. They took the car away from him. From *him*, the man whose hands had guided the great Ship!

What next? Hollander asked himself, what will I do next? I can never accept this exile, this living death. If they keep me here I'll end up killing somebody. Anybody. They're *all* to blame.

Sighing wearily, he closed his eyes, shutting out the bright beckoning stars . . .

"He isn't responding," said David Miller. "He's like the others. And we've done everything."

Dr. Burack put aside the folder marked Hollander and stood up. He walked past his assistant to the window. Ninety stories below traffic moved swiftly along the jet strips.

"I've called him in," Burack

said, the tone of defeat evident in his voice. "He knows that he can't get back into space. But he also knows that he's a freak in our world. That's the price a Servant pays. Abnormality is a virtue with the Ships; a normal man would be useless to us. Perhaps, some day, we can reverse the pattern. But not yet. Not now."

"Then you're going to commit him?" asked Miller.

"What else *can* I do at this point? If I don't commit him he'll break, turn violent. Hollander's a potential killer."

"He's also a public hero."

Burack smiled without warmth. "So were all the others. At least the public is well aware of our problem. That's why they built the Servants' Institution. Here the Hollanders can find peace. They won't find it anywhere else on Earth."

Miller nodded. "Maybe we can save the next one," he said. "We're advancing with each case. Maybe, next time, the Ships won't win."

Dr. Burack said nothing. He continued to stare at the distant ribbons of traffic.

Hollander walked down the long, brightly-illuminated corridor, arms swinging loosely at his sides, his fingertips brushing the regulation stripe on his trousers. It was wonderful to be wearing his uniform again, and the close-fitting

## TO SERVE THE SHIP

jacket gave him a sense of security he hadn't felt since the landing. He enjoyed the echoing slap of his boots against the smooth marble floor. Yes, it was good of them to give him back his uniform.

"Here we are, Norman," said Dr. Burack, indicating a heavy door. "This is where you'll stay from now on. I think you'll find we've thought of everything."

"Thank you," said Hollander. "I'm sure you have."

The two men shook hands.

"Goodbye, Doctor."

"Goodbye, Norman."

Dr. Burack watched Hollander go into the special room. He drew a long breath, then turned away.

*He entered the dim chamber, pausing just inside, his back pressed against the door. In the soft semi-darkness the room smelled of iron and aluminum and brass. Ahead of him, dials glowed faintly. Lord, but this is fine, he thought, breathing deeply, hands clenched. He closed his eyes in the warm familiar dark, thinking, this is where I belong; here I am complete:*

*Norman Jerome Hollander, Servant of the Ship.*



GET THE GAMMA HABIT.  
FOR DETAILS, SEE PAGE 3

You'll find out all about Rodman Edward Serling in this pithy, revealing interview with the gifted creator of TV's *The Twilight Zone*. Let us preface our visit with Mr. Serling by pointing out that his three paperback collections of "Stories From the Twilight Zone" are all runaway best sellers (with the first of the series now in its eighth printing). Rod lives the Good Life, in a lush house overlooking the ocean in Pacific Palisades, dictating his work in a spacious poolside studio containing his "golden girls" (the Emmys he has won for such television milestones as *Patterns* and *Requiem for a Heavyweight*), bound copies of his many scripts and an attractive secretary who keeps busy transcribing his award-winning words. Outspoken as always, Rod says what he believes—which has made him one of the industry's most controversial personalities. Here, without further ado, is uncensored Serling.

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

*Rod Serling*

GAMMA: As one of the "pioneers" of TV, you seem to have survived its many changes, while most of the old guard (Chayefsky, Mosel, Foote) have more or less deserted the fort. Can you explain this?

SERLING: I'm still in television—though I'm doing other things now too, such as screenplays—because I was lucky enough to sell a series to CBS, *The Twilight Zone*, in which I could continue to function creatively. The live dramatic shows that developed and supported the Chayefskys and Mosels just don't exist anymore, and so they got out of TV, headed for Broad-

way or took up screenwriting. I was fed up myself when *Zone* sold, and if it hadn't I probably wouldn't be in the game today. In fact, I've only written two or three other teleplays since *Zone* got rolling.

GAMMA: How many of the *Twilight Zone* scripts have you written?

SERLING: Well, we went on the air in the autumn of '59, and now our fourth season is underway... Counting the new hour-long scripts I did for it the total is over half a hundred. Under my contract I had to write 80% of the first two season's shows. Now the

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

pressure is off, which is a helluva big help. The grind was more than I'd bargained for. As exec producer as well as writer I had to sweat out all kinds of stuff — ratings, set costs, casting, locations, budgets . . . Time was a luxury. If I dropped a pencil and stooped to pick it up I was five minutes behind schedule.

GAMMA: When *Twilight Zone* was dropped by the sponsors after its first season, didn't a lot of fans write in to complain of this?

SERLING: Not exactly. We knew we had a strong show, so we sent out appeals to the viewers, asking them to write us if they wanted *Zone* to continue. We got over 2500 cards and letters in response, all of them urging us to stay on TV. This sold the sponsors, and we were able to continue.

GAMMA: What awards has *Zone* garnered?

SERLING: Quite a few. In January of 1960, it won a double award — as Best New Program (edging out *The Untouchables* by a single vote) and as Best Filmed Series. We also won the Screen Producers Guild Award as Best Produced TV Series of the year. Then there are the Emmys I got for writing *Zone*. And we've also won the "Hugo" awards, of course, from the science fiction conventions. And the Golden Globe Award this year. All very gratifying.

GAMMA: Wasn't *Zone* originally planned as an hour series?

SERLING: Actually, yes. I did a pilot at the hour length, *Time Element*, about a man who re-lives Pearl Harbor, and this appeared on the *Desilu Playhouse* in November of 1958. Then we decided to go for the half-hour format. This season we shifted over to the hour length. For next season, looks like we'll return to the half-hour format. It suits the show at that length.

GAMMA: Up to *Zone*, you'd written no fantasy or science fiction. Why did you plan a show of this type for your first series?

SERLING: For two reasons. Because I loved this area of imaginative, storytelling — and because there had never been a TV series like it. The strength of *Twilight Zone* is that through parable, through placing a social problem or controversial theme against a fantasy background you can make a point which, if more blatantly stated in a realistic frame, wouldn't be acceptable. Because of this, from time to time, we've been able to make some pertinent social comments on conformity, on prejudice, on political ideologies, without sponsor interference. It offered a whole new outlet, a new approach. I know I've been knocked by some veteran science fiction writers who've spent the better part of their lives in this creative

## ROD SERLING

area — I've been called an opportunist who's taken this story form that these guys have sweated out for years and used my reasonably affluent name to just step all over them to get *my* show on the air. Well, all I can say to these people is, I'm sorry they feel this way. *Zone* was an honest effort on my part. I tried not to step on any toes, but with a show such as this, you're almost bound to.

GAMMA: Come to think of it, you *did* write a science fiction script for MGM, didn't you?

SERLING: It was never produced — but I did a full screenplay on *No Blade of Grass*. This was a beautiful science fiction yarn, and I'm sorry it never got off the ground. Maybe it will be made some day.

GAMMA: How much of *Twilight Zone* do you own?

SERLING: 50%—plus the fact that I own the negatives of the show. Eventually, we hope to send it all over the world.

GAMMA: As the host on *Zone* you've been called "a thin Hitchcock." How do you like stepping in front of the TV cameras?

SERLING: There was no running character we could use as host, so CBS picked me. I had done some promotional films for them and they looked at these and decided on giving me a try. Actually, I photograph better than I look. Now people see me on the street

and they say "Gee, we thought you were six foot one," and I know they're thinking "God, this kid is only five feet five and he's got a broken nose!" But I think I've improved a lot since the first season, and the ham in me is pleased with this.

GAMMA: What about your highly-publicized troubles with censorship? Has the situation improved since the days when you battled the sponsors over *Noon on Doomsday* and *A Town Has Turned to Dust*?

SERLING: In the overall field of TV there's been no real improvement. If anything, it's worse. Sponsor interference is a stultifying, often destructive and inexcusable by-product of our mass-media system. Ideally, a sponsor should have no more interference rights than an advertiser in a magazine. At one time the networks could have demanded and received creative prerogatives. They could have demanded some kind of cleavage between the commercial and the artistic aspects of a program. But they gave this prerogative away.

GAMMA: Do you miss the tooth-and-nail sponsor battles characteristic of your *Playhouse 90* days?

SERLING: I never liked it. For years the newspapers portrayed me as the two-fisted kid who fought for every show I got on the air, a petulant little bastard who battled with everybody. In

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

contrast to some guys who never spoke out maybe I was controversial. I went on record — but many other writers did too who didn't happen to get the publicity. Chayefsky, for example, was as tough and honest a guy in his reaction to pressures as anyone I know. Same with Reggie Rose. We all spoke out to keep certain ideas and themes intact — and as often as we lost we sometimes won. But, if you stay in the game long enough you begin to pre-censor yourself.

GAMMA: How would you rate your present *Twilight Zone* efforts with your earlier work for shows such as *Playhouse 90*?

SERLING: This is like comparing a short story to a novel. I've written *Zones* in a day — I averaged one a week for a while — and I used to spend months polishing a 90. The scripts are often written and produced much too fast. We aim for quality but we don't always achieve it.

GAMMA: You don't seem fully satisfied with your present output. Have you thought of doing a Broadway play?

SERLING: Many times. I've tried to write for Broadway, but my attempts have not pleased me. I tried like the devil to turn *Requiem for a Heavyweight* into a legitimate play, did six rewrites, then gave it up when David Susskind agreed to produce it as a film. I

did the screenplay, which seemed to turn out pretty well. I'd say my principal goal is to write a good novel, which is the toughest of all to bring off. I sweated blood on those Bantam short story collections, so I know how far away I am from the craftsmanship required of a novel.

GAMMA: We've heard you don't use a typewriter. Why?

SERLING: In the beginning, back in the early 50s, I used to bang out the stuff myself, in a kind of one-handed, punching style which was tough on the keys. Then I began to use a dictaphone, to save time, and found I liked it. Now, with my dialogue, I get a chance to "sound it out." I really play the ham, too. With the big, emotional scenes I shout and roar and play all the parts. It helps to "live it up" as much as possible.

GAMMA: Let's examine your early years. How did you get into professional writing?

SERLING: I grew up in Binghamton, New York, and edited the school newspaper. My father was a wholesale butcher, and a good one, but he didn't want me and my brother Bob stuck behind a meat counter. Wanted us to go to college. War came along, and I joined the Army paratroopers in '43, took up boxing in the service, won 17 of 18 bouts, then broke my nose in two places and quit. Spent three years in the Pacific

## ROD SERLING

then went on to Antioch College in Ohio under the G.I. Bill. I really didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, but I felt a need to write, a kind of compulsion to get some of my thoughts down, so I began doing radio scripts, working part-time as an announcer at WINR. In 1950, when I was a senior, a script of mine took second place in a *Dr. Christian* contest, and my wife Carol and I got a free trip to New York out of it. By then I was hooked.

GAMMA: Did you start selling right away?

SERLING: Well, I sold a TV script for \$100 shortly thereafter, then got 40 rejections in a row! Television was in its primitive stage then, and radio was dying. In order to eat, I became a staff writer in Cincinnati. The grind was murderous — everything from soap commercials to public-service announcements to half-hour documentaries. I learned discipline, absorbed a time sense and a technique, but I was desperate to break away. They had me doing "folksy" bits — for which you only needed two elements: a hayseed M.C. who strummed a guitar and said "Shucks, friends," and a girl yodeler whose falsetto could break a beer mug at twenty paces. I also had the chore of composing prayer messages for an ex-tent revivalist, a fat-faced slob I cordially de-

tested on sight. So, when I sold three radio scripts in the winter of '51, I walked out for good. I earned around \$5,000 in my first year of free-lancing.

GAMMA: Wasn't *Patterns*, in January of 1955, your first real success?

SERLING: That's right. I'd written 71 other scripts up to that time, but it took *Patterns* to put me over, and it was an instant hit. One minute after that show went off the air my phone started to ring; it's been ringing ever since! Because of *Patterns*, within two weeks, I got 23 bids to write teleplays, several screenplay offers, 14 requests for interviews, two luncheon invitations from Broadway producers and bids from a book publisher. I suddenly found that I could sell practically everything I had in the trunk, and I had 20 of my scripts telecast that season, earning \$80,000. I still blush when I think of some of the bombs I unloaded that year, but I was the hungry kid left all alone in the candy store. Man, I just grabbed! My first screen job was at Fox on a war flick called *Between Heaven and Hell*. I turned in a script that would have run for nine hours on the screen. As I recall, it was over 500 pages. I didn't know what the hell I was doing. They just said "Here's fifteen hundred bucks a week — write!" So I wrote. They eventually took the

## THE GAMMA INTERVIEW:

thing away from me and handed it over to six other writers, but I lay claim to the fact that my version had some wonderful moments in it. In nine hours of script, by God, there *has* to be a couple of wonderful moments!

GAMMA: You got your first Emmy out of *Patterns*. How many do you have by now?

SERLING: Got one for *Requiem*, one for *The Comedian* and a couple for *Twilight Zone*. I've been damned lucky.

GAMMA: How did success affect you when you jumped from \$5,000 a year to \$80,000?

SERLING: You can't throw overnight success down your gut and expect ready digestion. Life took on a glittering, unreal quality. I wandered through a crazy, whipped-cream world where everything was suddenly mink and mobile dollar signs. In '59, for *Playhouse 90*, I did a fictionized version of the problems you encounter which I called *The Velvet Alley*. The externals of the play were definitely autobiographical—the pressures, the assault on values, the blandishments that run in competition to a man's creativity. I left strips of flesh all over the studio with that one. Success can be rugged. The major fear is, once you've got it, will you lose it? You become accustomed to a gardener and a big house and a pool and a Lincoln in the driveway. As

a creative artist, if acquisition becomes more important than the work you put out, then you're in deep trouble. That's what happened to the protagonist in my teleplay.

GAMMA: Can you continue to expand in TV?

SERLING: I doubt it. Part of this has to do with the age we live in. There's a general tendency toward escapism, because everyday reality is awfully tough to swallow. We're living on the doorstep of the hydrogen bomb and we don't know, between Monday and Friday, just what the hell is going to happen to us. In drama this means the public can't accept strong meat; they want to forget their troubles with cowpokes and private eyes. So a serious writer, with something to say beyond "Howdy, pard," has to turn to other fields. Television tries to please everybody. To achieve what the sponsor thinks of as "the mass level" you end up with blank verse written on a marshmallow! And after awhile, when you're told things like troops can't *ford* a river if Chevy is the sponsor, you just don't give a damn.

GAMMA: How do you escape the TV grind?

SERLING: We still manage to get away once a year for two months up on Lake Cayuga in New York. We've got a cabin up there built by my wife's great, great grand-

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father. We take the kids, Nan and Jody, and head for the lake each summer. I do a lot of boating and water skiing and fishing up there. Helps keep me in shape. Fact is, I'd go nuts without those two months.

GAMMA: Of all your 200 or more produced teleplays, can you pick a favorite?

SERLING: I'd have to give the nod to *Requiem*. It brought me the most satisfaction, and I think it is my best job of writing. Its basic premise is that every man can and *must* search for his own personal dignity. My ex-prize fighter did just that, and I think there was particular poignance in having a discarded, battered hulk of a man move out into the world that had cheered him and was now alien to him.

GAMMA: Coming back to the present state of TV, don't you think that pay television might be the answer to better programming?

SERLING: I wish I could see it

that way, but I don't. The guys behind it will want to milk as many quarters or half-dollars as possible out of people, so meaty, controversial themes, appealing to a more limited audience won't be welcome. TV is diseased, and a dab of Mercurochrome isn't the answer when it's obvious that the total organism needs major surgery.

GAMMA: Then you don't link your future with TV?

SERLING: I don't know *what's* in my future. But I'd like to do more screenplays, work for the legitimate stage, maybe even try my hand at direction — just once, to see how it feels from that end — and then tackle the novel. I just hope to God I can take the time off to do that novel. I'm a security-hungry guy, and I work best under pressure. And you can't do a good novel under pressure. So, I can't plan too far ahead. As Jonathan Winters says, "It's tough enough getting through Saturday."



When Frank Sinatra's *Ocean's 11* was released by Warners in 1960 the screen credits listed one George Clayton Johnson as co-author of the basic story. This fast-moving "Clan caper," starring the cool Sinatra as Danny Ocean, concerned the criminal exploits of a group of ex-servicemen who devise a "foolproof" plan to rob the rich casinos of Las Vegas. The original script (which, in the manner of all Hollywood big-star properties, saw many revisions before reaching the screen) was written by Johnson in 1956, with the help of writer-pal Jack G. Russell. Its overwhelming box-office success provided the impetus Johnson needed to abandon his job as an architect and move into the writing game on a professional basis. He has since turned out several television scripts (for such quality shows as *Route 66*, *The Law and Mrs. Jones* and *Twilight Zone*) and his co-adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Icarus Montgolfier Wright* won an Academy Award nomination early this year. One of Johnson's fantasy shorts from *Rogue* has recently been anthologized in a Ballantine collection — and with the following story, written for GAMMA 1, he proves equally adept at science fiction. The next time you spot a car broken down by the side of your local freeway you'll certainly recall this deftly-executed narrative of "the very near future."

## THE FREEWAY

*George Clayton Johnson*

The fat swift car blazed down the freeway.

Arthur C. Danyluk held the steering wheel. He twisted it from side to side experimentally. Nothing happened of course. Nothing ever happened on the freeway. The grid took care of that. He tried to remember how long it had been since he'd had this machine on manual. It seemed like years.

He let go of the wheel and stud-

ied his thick, soft hands before dropping them into his lap. He looked out at the desert, shimmering in the heat, then at the girl who sat beside him. She had the TV swiveled toward her and was looking at it with a wide, trance-like stare.

Aware of his attention, she stretched her arms over her head languorously, shifting her position without taking her eyes from the

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screen. He could see perspiration stains on the underarms of her blouse.

"The next town we come to I'll get the cooling unit fixed," he said. "I can't imagine what happened to it . . ."

She turned to glance at him abstractedly for a moment, then looked back at the picture.

"It's a shame we had to put all the food in the disposal, but it would have spoiled in the fridge."

When she didn't answer, he opened the locker on the dash and took out a slim crystal glass. He thumbed the button on the dispenser and watched the clear liquid foam out. The stream stopped when the glass was half full.

"The Last of the Martinis. Guess we'll have to tighten our belts till we get to the next town." He held the fragile glass out to her gallantly.

"Thanks," she said. "I'm parched." She tilted the drink to her lips and sipped. She made a face. "It's warm. Who can drink warm gin?" She put the glass down on the dash-bar. "We've been driving for *ages*. If I'd known it was going to take *forever*, I simply wouldn't have come."

"It isn't so bad," he said soothingly, thinking that it might be very bad indeed. "We'll probably be there sometime late this evening. This boat makes nearly two hundred miles an hour."

"Oh, look!" she said, tragically. "What happened to the picture?" She gestured toward the TV. The screen was a mass of wavy lines.

"Let me see," he said. He turned the set toward him and adjusted a knob. The screen went black.

"Now look what you did," she said.

"It wasn't me," he said, his voice heavy with annoyance. "First the cooling system goes on the blink, then the TV. You can't blame *me* for that."

"No, I suppose not."

She sat sullenly for a few minutes looking out of the car window at the bright passing desert. Miniature droplets of perspiration beaded her upper lip. "God," she said at last. "I feel like I'm in a bake oven. Can't you at least open one of the windows and get a little breeze in here?" She scooted down in the seat. Her skirt rode upward, exposing three inches of moist thigh. She didn't seem to notice.

He leaned forward and thumbed the control button and waited for the whisking sound of the hidden motor that would operate the window. Nothing happened. He hit the button again. Then his fingers danced over the bank of buttons that controlled the other windows.

"It seems like everything's on the fritz today," he said. He looked at her, feeling a sudden surge of sympathy. "We should come to a turnoff soon. We'll get something

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cool to drink and get everything fixed."

"Just *look out there*," she said, pointing to the desert that sped past the car. "Did you ever see anything so *dead* in your life?"

He sighed, said nothing.

"I should have worn something lighter," she said. She pursed her pink lips and blew air down the front of her amply-filled blouse.

He thought about touching her knee.

The car lurched abruptly.

"What was that?" she said.

"I don't know."

The car coughed, losing speed.

"Do something!"

His hands found the steering wheel and held it uncertainly. The car was losing momentum fast. It took him several seconds to find the manual stud. The steering wheel, suddenly alive, felt alien in his hands. Fortunately, there was a gap between the cars in the slow lane, and he maneuvered the heavy vehicle into it.

"Engine's dying," he said.

Spotting a wide section of road, he wrenched the wheel to the right and felt himself pushed violently forward. He stuck out his arm to steady the girl while his foot stabbed for the brake. He shoved downward, and the car came ponderously to a halt on the dirt shoulder.

When he saw that the girl wasn't hurt, he reached in his pocket and

took out his handkerchief. He began to wipe his face and neck with it.

"Well, don't just *sit* there. Find out what's wrong."

"Yes," he said. "Of course." He sat still in the seat and looked at the knobs and dials on the dashboard. All of the tiny winking lights had gone out.

"Well?"

"Just a minute," he said. "Wait for it to cool off."

He turned the key tentatively and listened to the sound of the starter. It ground over and over. To Arthur, it sounded like a monster gnashing its teeth. He released the key with a sinking feeling.

"Well, can't you fix it?" she asked. Her bright blonde hair had tumbled over her forehead, and she pushed it back with an impatient gesture.

He pumped the gas feed several times and tried the starter again. It growled resonantly. "I don't understand," he said.

"Now this is damned silly," she said. "Are we just going to sit here? We can't just *sit* here."

"The mechanic definitely told me that the car was ready for a trip," he said.

"Maybe we're out of gas."

"Can't you read the gauge?" he said harshly. It registered full.

"Well, you don't have to lose your temper," she said. "If I'd thought you were going to act this

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way, I would never have agreed to spend my vacation with you." She took out her compact and snapped it open. "Look what this heat is doing to my makeup."

"We can always stop somebody and ask for help," he said.

"Can't you fix it yourself?"

"What do I know about cars?" he said. "All I know is this thing cost me twelve thousand dollars. There's no reason in the world why it should just *die* like this."

"It seems like the sensible thing to do is open the front and see what's wrong. Maybe a wire came loose or something."

Arthur felt irritation growing inside him. Of all the times to have this yapping dame with him!

He began to search over the dash panel for a button or lever with the word HOOD on it. There had to be a way to get the stupid hood open.

I've been driving a car for almost thirty years, he thought. I've owned this one for two years and in all that time I've never opened the hood on the thing. And why should I? That's what service stations are for. Why should a man spend twelve thousand dollars for a car and then have to service it himself?

"Maybe you open it from outside," the girl said.

He straightened up guiltily.

"I know," he said. "I know."

He opened the door and climbed

out of the car. The sun hit him like a fist. For a moment the desert looked like a film negative; all of the dark areas registered white. Then everything came into focus.

God, what a desolate spot! He couldn't see a single sign of habitation except the freeway and the bright automobiles crashing by. Ahead, the freeway climbed to a crest, then disappeared. The cars seemed to pour up the road and then, as they reached that point, plunge into the earth. Gone. To be replaced by other cars in a never-ending stream of bright enamel.

Everywhere else was the desert.

Far off were dim hills almost lost in the golden glare of reflected sun.

He could feel the moisture popping out on his skin as he walked to the front of the car. He got down on one knee to look for the hood release. It ought to be here somewhere, he thought. They wouldn't build a car so you couldn't get to the engine. He felt a growing anger. They made it so easy for you, he thought. They sold you a machine that only a highly trained man with expensive equipment could fix. They filled your ears with glib phrases that promised a lifetime of trouble-free usage. They tended its engine, filling it with gasoline and lubricants so that somehow you got the idea that the car was more theirs than yours and then, to cap it all

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off, they installed the grid in the highways so that you didn't even have to drive the car.

His groping fingers found a lever cleverly concealed within the intricately shaped grill. He pushed it forward. When nothing happened he hooked his finger around it and pulled. Like the door to Ali Baba's cave, the hood swung magically and majestically open.

Arthur waited for the vast hood to sweep to a stop before he stepped forward to peer within.

There it was, nestled in deep shadow.

The engine.

"My God," said Arthur Danyluk.

Once, long ago, when he was a small child, his father had taken him to a museum. They had wandered through endless corridors and at last they came to a vast room.

In the precise center of the room, towering to the roof, was a great dark locomotive. He remembered the awe with which he had regarded that huge mass of strangely carved metal. The wheels rested on rails, and it seemed to loom above him like a great black beast.

Now he peered at the engine of his car and felt that same awe and wonder clutch at his throat.

He could see thick cables looped in coils that formed a maze, entwining here and there in no discernible pattern. There were

strange boxes and cylindrical lumps attached randomly atop, astride and athwart a central mass of oil-black strangeness. It hunched up between flaring metal walls that seemed to double back upon themselves. He could see no portion of the whole that presented a clean unbroken plane or curve. Tiny slim wires and tubes interconnected from part to part, branching and reuniting in a nightmare of complexity.

The engine!

He sucked in his breath, blinking his eyes.

He put out his hand and rapped one of the larger shapes apprehensively. Somewhere, he thought. Somewhere inside all of that there is something wrong. He shook his head dazedly.

He could hear the girl's voice coming to him muffled and indistinct. "What are you doing? Have you found the trouble?"

Yes, he thought. I've found the trouble.

He tried to keep his voice steady. "Looks all right to me," he said. "Nothing seems to be broken."

"Did you check the points?"

He tried to recall if he had seen anything sharply pointed under the hood. "Of course," he said. "First thing I looked at."

"I guess you know you've gotten yourself all filthy?"

He squinted down at his new

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shirt. It had a long ugly smear of grease across the front. "It doesn't matter," he said.

He made his way back to the driver's seat and climbed behind the wheel. He tried the starter again, letting it grind for a long time before he turned the key off.

"Well, that's that," he said.

"You mean we're stuck?"

"I guess so."

She saw him looking at her bare knees, and pulled the skirt down. "I should have my head examined," she said. "I could be back in town having a chilled cocktail."

"You didn't *have* to come," he said, flushing.

She crossed her arms over her breasts.

His manner softened. "Let's not fight," he said. "As far as I can see, we have several alternatives. We can sit here a while and hope that the difficulty with the car will iron itself out. Perhaps, when the engine cools off, it will start right up. If it should turn out to be something more serious, we can flag down a passing car and ask for a lift to the closest town. We can send a mechanic back to get the car. While we're waiting, we can have something to eat, a few cold drinks and a change of clothing. When the car is ready, we can resume our trip."

His calm tone seemed to reassure the girl.

They sat still for a few moments.

She took out her compact and began to repair her makeup. She examined her eyelashes critically before reaching in her purse to take out a thin metal device. She began to improve the curve in her lashes. He tried not to watch her.

"Now," he said at last. "Let's try it." He turned the key and the starter ground over. He rocked his foot violently against the gas feed. Nothing happened. He tried again. "Well," he said. "You can wait in the car while I flag down somebody. We shouldn't have any trouble."

"All right," she said. "But hurry."

He climbed down out of the car and stood beside the freeway. He had his thumb out when the first car approached.

It sped past—as did the second and the third. They whipped by in a blur of motion. He felt slightly foolish standing there by the side of the freeway with his thumb out. He looked over his shoulder at the girl. She had a minuscule pair of tweezers in her hand and, squinting into her compact mirror, was busy uprooting her eyebrows. He turned back to the freeway and the rush of cars.

The freeway!

Six lanes of moving metal slamming through the heat of day. And yet, each car stood out separately. It was as though his eyes were a stop-motion camera photographing each machine that

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passed. Inside each individual car he could see the people. They sprawled languidly, enervated by the baked air, struck into positions of boredom in their private worlds of vivid metal, fabric, leatherette and plastic.

It occurred to him then that he could only appeal for help to the outermost lane. In the brief span of time that the cars whipped by, it was clearly impossible for the cars in the other five lanes to maneuver into the slow lane to help him, even if they wanted to.

"Damn!" said the girl. "Can't you do anything? Wave your hand so they can *see* you!"

"All right," he said. "I'm trying!"

He waved his arm feebly.

They're not going to stop, he thought. Nobody's going to stop. Everyone's in such a hurry that they haven't the time. And who am I that they should help me? How can they know that I'm not some desperado who would hold them up and take their car and money. A feeling of strength came over him thinking of himself as an outlaw. But isn't that what I am? Alone on the freeway beyond the reach of law and custom? Certainly there are police officers at checkpoints and turnoffs to control manual traffic, but out here they don't exist. It's true. By the simple act of being alone away from the others I am an outlaw.

The feeling of strength faded,

to be replaced by a seeping weakness. He began to be afraid.

An hour went by as he stood there signaling the cars. The sun made him dizzy and he could feel the muscles in his back and legs sag. His eyes began to sting and his mouth felt raw.

The cars seemed to come in bunches. One minute the freeway would be empty as far as the eye could see, silent and dreaming in the noon tide, and then the cars would come in a tight knot of screaming sound, ten or twenty of them clustered together.

Occasionally a single car or a pair of cars would slam down the freeway, separated from the others, skurrying along like metal chicks hunting the hen, as though afraid to be alone on the concrete runway.

At these times, Arthur Danyluk made exaggerated motions with his arm and thumb, hoping that one of the vehicles would stop. They *could* stop, he thought, without being run over by other cars, but the autos swung past as though he didn't exist. Once, inside a yellow car, he saw a young girl poised like a manikin with a long-stemmed glass to her lips. He became conscious of his great thirst.

Another fifteen minutes went by.

Well, when it came right down to it, he thought, startled, where would a car pull off the freeway if

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one decided to stop? If the driver had the presence of mind to disconnect from the grid in time, where would he halt the car safe from traffic?

Ahead was a smooth piece of ground about six car-lengths long on which an auto might stop, but even then it would have to get its wheels in the dirt as he had done. And that could be dangerous. He tried to picture the driving skill that would be required to slow a car down and slew it into that tiny space. It would be clearly impossible if the driver were closely followed by other cars.

He held his weary arm out for a few minutes more and then let it drop to his side.

"What are you *doing*?" said the girl, leaning out of the open door. He gestured her out of the way and climbed inside.

"I've got to rest a few minutes," he said. "I'm bushed." He leaned back against the seat, breathing heavily.

"I'm thirsty," said the girl. She looked pale and upset.

He didn't answer her.

He leaned forward and gripped the steering wheel with both hands. He pumped the gas feed several times and then turned the key in the ignition. They listened to the hollow sound of the churning starter.

"Well," she said. "What do we do now?"

"Let me rest for a few minutes and I'll try to stop somebody." He slumped weakly in the seat.

"I don't see why you should be so tired. You haven't done anything."

He ignored her and looked off down the freeway. Ahead was the rise where the freeway dipped out of sight. He tried to estimate how far it was. In the afternoon sun, distances were deceptive. It might be one mile or three.

"Listen," he said to the girl. "Here's what we'll do. You stay in the car and keep an eye on things. If anybody stops, you tell them what happened. I'm going to walk up ahead. There might be a house or a service station up there."

"You're just going to leave me?"

"Suit yourself," he said shortly. "If you want to walk, it's all right with me. I thought it would be easier on you to sit here out of the sun, but if you want, you can come along." He looked at her sharply, wishing that she'd get off his neck. He had enough trouble without taking more complaints from her. "Well, have you decided what you want to do?"

"Oh, God," she said in a frustrated tone. "Why couldn't I have picked out a young man who knew something about engine . . ."

He finished the sentence for her. "Instead of a fat, middle-aged fool?"

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"I didn't say that."

"But you were thinking it."

She saw the look on his face and didn't answer.

He sagged tiredly, turned on his heel and strode off down the freeway, leaving her in the silent car.

By the time he had covered a half mile, his legs began to grow stiff. He could feel a tiny pain in his side.

A middle-aged man, he thought. Is that what I am? Looking back it seemed that was all he had ever been. Just a middle-aged fat fool unable to do anything for himself. He had a gardener to come in and tend his lawn, someone to cook his meals, make his bed, launder his clothing...

Living had become too complicated. There was a time, he thought, when each man made the things he used. He built his home from trees and mud. He wove his own clothing and grew his own food. True, he didn't have much, but there was no need for him to feel insecure in his house surrounded by the product of his own hands. If something broke he could repair it in the same manner he had built it. But now everything was too complicated for that. Ten thousand men put food in cans, and when the cans were opened what wasn't eaten could be put in a refrigerator where it would not spoil. But the refrigerator was made by men, and if it

failed other men were called in to fix it using tools created by still *other* men and all of the men put together were called society. It was a fine system if you were part of it, but if you lost your key and were somehow locked out you could die pounding on the door.

His legs began to knot up again. He suddenly discovered that he was lurching from side to side as he walked, weaving drunkenly.

Hold on, he thought. Get a grip on yourself.

He lifted his feet carefully and placed one after another, concentrating on his task.

The pain in his side was worse, and he was puffing.

Far ahead, the road rose to the shimmering horizon.

He tried to hum under his breath to establish a marching cadence, but the sound was a feeble moan.

He decided not to look ahead. It was easier to look at the ground as he walked.

When he was a boy, he remembered, his father had apple trees planted in the back yard. When the fruit was ripe his father would pick it and carry the baskets to the basement. He would peel and quarter the apples into a large tub and pulp them into a mash. Then he would seal them in an earthenware crock and wait for them to turn to cider.

His mother would laugh and

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tell his father that cider was on sale at the supermarket for a half dollar a gallon, but his father would smile and ignore her.

In the fall his father would sit among the dead leaves in the backyard on the grass that he had planted himself, under an apple tree that had grown from a seed, drinking his cider and looking at the rock garden that he had built with his own two hands.

His father was a happy man.

Arthur had never really understood him until this moment, by the freeway.

As he walked with his head down he noticed the debris that littered the edge of the road. His eyes picked out crumpled cigarette packages, beer cans, scraps of paper—and then he saw a strange thing. On patches of smooth ground he saw rabbit tracks. The paw marks made a clear pattern in the dust. He stopped. His eyes followed the tracks off across the desert. It was then he spotted the rabbit, the first he had seen in his entire life.

It stood between two scrubby cactus shrubs about twenty feet away, its ears perked up, looking at him.

He took another step, expecting it to explode into motion. The rabbit stood stiffly for a moment, its nose twitching, and then came down on all fours and nibbled at the closest bit of brush.

Well I'll be damned, he thought. It's not afraid. It's probably never seen a human on foot in its entire life. I could walk right up to it before it ran away. It seemed incredible that the rabbit could see the cars go by all day and still be unaware that humans existed.

Abruptly, he dismissed the rabbit from his thoughts, as he topped the rise in the road. Ahead was only more desert with the freeway slanting across it until it vanished behind a low hill miles away.

He heard the horn honk.

He looked up to see a car go by him. Squinting his eyes, he could see a blonde in the front seat beside a youngish looking man. The girl waved saucily at him. The car was a jalopy, a 1965 model by the looks of it. That meant that it couldn't be tuned to the grid. The realization that a car could be manually operated down a freeway came as a shock to him. Then his system suffered another shock.

He felt his stomach sink within him. He recognized the girl. It was his blonde.

The trip back to the car was hell.

From time to time he had to sit down and rest. Sprawled in the litter beside the roadway, he cursed himself and his car and the people who whisked by him.

Then somehow he got his feet under him and tottered on.

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He could feel a blister forming on the heel of his left foot. It was clear that his *stylish oxfords* weren't meant for walking.

He stumbled the last hundred yards in a lurching run and collapsed against the side of the car. He didn't have the strength to open the door and get inside.

A half hour passed before he could get to his feet.

He saw the skid marks that the other car had made coming to a stop. The black streaks of rubber testified to the desperate chance that the driver had taken to halt his car in the dust. He felt a quick anger that filled him completely. When it passed he felt drained.

Why couldn't she have flagged the man down while *he* had been there? No, she had to wait till he was far up the road. And then that idiot of a driver burning up his tires to rescue the damsel in distress. But then he thought: Wouldn't you do the same thing? If you saw a striking blonde alone on the highway, wouldn't you do everything in your power to help her out? He wondered why it hadn't occurred to him before. Nobody would pass a pretty girl in trouble. They'd stop for that, but not for a man in the same fix. They wouldn't stop for a dozen good reasons. Because they were alone or were with somebody. Because of the traffic, because, because, because . . .

Arthur Danylik could feel the sweat greasy on his body as the hot sunlight blasted down on him. He climbed back into the car. Well, he thought. Where do we go from here? What do we do now? Do I stand there with my thumb out till I fall over from heat stroke or until my tissues dry up and I die of thirst? And when it gets dark and the cold comes down, do I shiver in the back seat of this useless car until the sun rises again?

And when next week comes, will I be stretched out in a twelve thousand dollar coffin beside the freeway? Will I wait for the insects and small animals to pick my bones?

He felt tired and old and afraid.

He shaded his eyes against the sun - glare from the hood, his tongue swollen in his mouth.

Sitting there, he saw the desert clearly for the first time. He saw the real enemy - the baked dirt and the sparse growth, the rocks and the pebbles.

Are *you* the reason we put up durable buildings and swift machines and great freeways? So that by complexity and sheer numbers we can build faster than you can tear down and wear away?

He could feel little golden spots dancing under his lids as he squeezed his eyes tight.

Is that the way it is? he thought

## GEORGE CLAYTON JOHNSON

quickly. Must we gather together in strength to stay alive? Is one man helpless against you? Don't I, Arthur Danyluk, have a chance?

The desert waited . . . the same desert the pioneers had crossed, men who refused to conform, who defied the odds for a chance to make their own way.

Then, inside himself, he knew the answer. He thought about his father, and a hard light came into his eyes.

With his thick, soft hand, he opened the car door and climbed out. He went around to the trunk and fumbled it open. He selected a wrench from the tool kit. He wasn't going to starve, by damn! He had matches to start a fire. And the tracks he'd seen, the

rabbit . . . Life was out there. He once had a good throwing arm. And he'd read that quite a few desert plants contained water . . .

He looked at the automobiles flowing past him in a great tide and listened to the drum of engines on the still desert air. The reflected light from the sun-dazzled doors and fenders hammered at his eyes. Damn them, he thought, I don't need any of them! Setting his shoulders, he turned away, into the desert. The freeway dwindled behind him; the hurrying cars vanished into hot silence. Only the waiting land surrounded him now. Ahead, behind, to either side.

Arthur C. Danyluk moved out to face the enemy.



In the tradition of Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and James Baldwin (who not only tackled the social problems of their race, but never failed to tell a solid story), the noted young Negro writer, Herbert Simmons, has produced, specifically for GAMMA 1, his first science fiction story, utilizing a knowledge and love of Jazz to fashion this brief, telling parable of the future. Simmons, now in his early thirties, grew up in St. Louis, entered Lincoln University, then switched to the University of Washington, where he won a General Scholarship in 1956. Based on chapter submissions from his college creative writing class, Herb's manuscript, *Corner Boy*, won him the coveted Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship in '57, and with the publication of this book he joined the select company of such HM winners as Robert Penn Warren, Anthony West, Arthur Mizener, Eugene Burdick and Philip Roth. His latest novel, *Man Walking on Eggshells*, published last year, confirmed the opinion of critics who hailed Simmons as "a strong new voice in fiction." We may as well confess that one of the joys of editorship (offsetting many of its sorrows) lies in the publication of a story such as this: simple, funny, sad, thought-provoking and, most decidedly, science fiction.

## ONE NIGHT STAND

*Herbert A. Simmons*

... On a good clear night you can hear him, climbing higher and higher; riding that mellow trumpet on golden notes hot enough to melt the sun...

Maury blew like something different, man, I mean like something else. He could lean on it, or play it cool. He could take it out, or bring it in so close and clean you'd swear he was shaving those notes out of that ax with a razor;

and soul, man, he had room enough inside to drop the problems of the world, at least he blew like he did. Hell, baby, that's why we were so high on the stud.

Only thing about Maury, he was so way out it took a musician, I mean a real pro, to dig what he was after and what he was getting out of that horn. The trouble with Maury he was a good twenty years ahead of his time. I don't say that

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because of what came later either. I'm just running it down to you the way it was.

Back in those days though, he hadn't gotten himself together. He was too full of hurt, you know what I mean? Like everybody's hip that it takes some hard knocks to create an artist, and that's what Maury was, but what they ain't hip to is that it takes love to make that artist cut loose something useful to the world as well as himself.

Now don't knock me, man, so I knew what he needed. There wasn't nothing I could do about it. Hell, baby, I wasn't his mother; I couldn't hold his hand. I mean, let's face it, broads are here to stay. Maury's trouble was he didn't have none.

I was hip to why he didn't have a dame. It wasn't his looks, even though his eyes did look like they'd muscled in on territory his nose was supposed to occupy and his forehead didn't exactly jut out like a mountain peak, but left that impression, but you know and I know that there's some Frankenstein characters around with a whole stable of broads.

The boys used to get on him about never being with no dames.

"I'm in love with my horn," Maury said.

He was, too, that was the point. He was strung out behind it like a kite on a string.

I knew what was happening with Maury. I had gotten bugged behind the same thing myself for awhile. See, man, you start out trying to conquer a horn and because it's a bitch and hard to control, if you ain't careful that damn horn ends up conquering you.

That's why the stud was so lame when it came to dames. He'd spent so much of his life learning that horn he'd never taken time out to find out about the birds and the bees.

Well, joining our group hadn't made it any better. We were booked for one night stands all over the world and believe me, baby, you got to be a real pro to make out under those circumstances. To tell you the truth I wasn't too happy about those one night stands myself, but the pay was fat, and it was an experience that never happened to most people in a lifetime, so I let it ride.

Then one day I put my foot down; I mean, man I had to. That dizzy manager booked us into a one night stand in the Flame Room in Redville. You got it, Redville!

"Ervin, this time you've gone too far," I told him. "This time you got to pass the dice."

"But you can't back out, Pitts. I already signed the contracts. Besides it'll be a great new experience for you and the boys."

"Nothing doing, Ervie, you're still throwing snake-eyes."

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"But, Pitts, where's your spirit of adventure, your sense of responsibility to your fans?"

"Ervin," I told him, "you talked me into playing before hip Eskimos in the north pole with the temperature 70 below, and you got me to step it around to Peru for a gig on a stand 130 degrees in the shade. You even got me to make the scene in that new Island in the sky over Madrid. But this time, man, I got to cut you loose. This gig is too way out. Are you flipping?"

"But Pitts."

"Forget it."

When I told the boys about it they were with me; everybody but Maury. Maury just sat there with a far away look in his eyes.

"Man, I bet them folks in Redville'll dig my playing," Maury said.

"Maury, everybody digs your playing down here," I told him.

"Naw, they don't, man, not really. They don't really dig it," he said.

"Maury, you're just twenty-three years old," I reminded him. "Give it time. You blow a way out horn, man, you got to give people a chance to catch up with you."

"Pitts, you don't understand. You don't know what it's like to get up on that stand night after night and play that horn and know you're giving out with everything you got and nobody out there giving a

damn. I'd go a long ways to be appreciated even once," Maury said. "I'd go a long ways just on the chance I might be appreciated."

"All the way to Redville, Maury? All the way to Mars?"

I wanted to tell him why they didn't dig him, why he could only get through to musicians who recognized a new jazz gospel being preached when they heard it, even though it wasn't all together yet, but how can you tell a stud like Maury that the only right thing about his life is wrong?

So we ended up going.

Now, man, if you're waiting for me to tell you about the moon and the stars and the milky way and all that jazz, that ain't what's happening. We left at night, man. We got there the next day. I slept all the way. I'm a musician. I ain't no astronaut. I didn't dig the changes the sky was running outside the window on that ride, so I dropped my lids on it and let it stay out there where it was, while I stayed inside where I was. Are you hip? Do you dig?

Well, man, we weren't taking any chances. Imagine what might happen if you accidentally broke a law around that place? We gave Maury plenty of company in our hotel rooms. Like this was *one* one night stand wasn't nobody trying to make out in.

Maury sat around shining that

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horn like always, fingering the instrument, putting it to his lips and silently soloing his life away. He wasn't even living for now. He was living for tonight. Tonight when he would take his turn on the stand.

Then something happened we'd never seen before. This hotel maid came in with some chow and got Maury's attention off that horn, and on her.

Pete and Charlie liked to flipped. I had a hard time playing it straight myself. She even got the stud to eating what she'd brought in. Not us though; we'd brought our own food with us and we weren't about to throw it away. Maury swore the local cooking was great.

"You studs don't know what you're missing. These pecks are out of this world, man, really something different."

"Yeah, Maury, I can see that," I told him. I mean, let's face it, man, I like my butter yellow.

Anyway, Maury and this broad really began to turn each other on. The only thing I could see standing between them was a language problem, but since when has love ever had any trouble making itself understood? Too bad it was just a one night stand, I was thinking. Too bad it was on Mars.

Finally came gig time. It was a packed house too. Right away I knew this set was going to be

something special. There was a feeling in the air, even while I was setting up the tape recorder, a feeling that matched the look in Maury's eyes. I made damn sure the mikes were jacked in. I wasn't *about* to miss this one.

From the beginning, it was a gas, I mean a real groove. Now, man, I wasn't no slouch, in fact the boys claimed I was so hot that night that I scorched the barrel with notes even Yard would have been proud to call his own, but Maury, Jim, that cat was out of sight. He began laying down riffs so hot they made Louie, Diz and Miles sound like little boys playing with matches, so that Pete couldn't help but set the box afire, with Charlie and Ed fanning the flames. *How High The Moon*, that's what we were playing with Ed laying that message down, sticks flying so fast all you could see was a blur and sweat pouring down his face like he was burning up and somebody had turned on the hose, with the crowd out there oohing and ahing, and Maury smiling, knowing he had it then, knowing he had them at last, and Charlie walking that bass into a run. Oh, we got hot, man, we got wild. Right from the beginning we were a burning bitch, and that's no jive, giving out like an old time Baptist preacher on a Sunday morning, giving out so hard it was like no smoke, man, no smoke at all. We were cooking,

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man, we were sizzling, we were really beginning to brown and all the time we could feel that crowd with us warming up and steaming and beggin' us never to cool down, but hell, man, we were human, we had to cool down sometime, didn't we? I mean, hell, baby, who could play like that all night long?

Maury could, that's who, and he did, getting surer and surer as he went along, soaring higher and higher on that mellow horn. Talking about how high the moon, hell, man, he was above it, and he kept right on going, until he had worn the shoes off us, until he had worn us to a frazzle and hung our tongues out to dry.

"Maury, baby, take it easy," I told him, but he never heard me. There was that gleam in his eyes and that crowd in his ears. It didn't matter we couldn't play anymore. He took it on by his lonesome. Maury had gotten through at last. He went on like that all night long and when the gig was over and the broad he had been playing to and for came over and they drink into each other's eyes, we knew what had gotten into Maury that night. Nobody had to ask him why. They even went off to his hotel room together, now ain't that a bitch?

"Man, I don't get it?" Pete said. "I mean it just don't figure? Hell, the stud don't know how to even talk to a broad?"

"Maybe, that's just it," I told him.

"How's that?"

"He didn't have to."

"Oh, I don't know," Charlie said. "From where I was sitting his horn would of made Casanova sound like a schoolboy."

Yeh, that's the sad part of it. Harry was courting that broad with that horn. It wasn't a one night stand like we had figured either. It was for real.

"Pitts, I ain't going back with you guys," he said. "The babe's too much; like she's something I ain't never had."

It didn't matter his skin was black and her's was blue either.

"Well, for God's sake, Maury, take her back with you," I said.

Maury shook his head. "They ain't ready for a broad like her down there yet," Maury said.

We knew what he meant.

"There's something else, too, Pitts," he said. "The people around here dig my blowing. You heard 'em Pitts. You were there. You know how it was."

Maury, I started to say, the way you were blowing last night they would dig you anywhere, but I didn't. I didn't because I knew what it was and what it took to get him to play like that.

Well, when we got back, Ervin was sore as hell.

"Not only do you leave the best trumpet player I ever got you up

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there, but you threw the tapes out the window too," he said. "The record company's gonna sue me. If it's as good as you say it was we would of made a fortune. Oh my aching head."

But the hell with that noise, if the solar batteries hold out on that micro-transmitter like the engineer on the rocket ship told us, that tape's gonna be orbiting around forever, playing in that

little box, which is the way it should be. Somehow it seems the least we could do for Maury, making him immortal I mean.

And that's why now, on a clear night, if you tune in on the right wave lengths you can hear Maury climbing higher and higher, riding that mellow trumpet on golden notes hot enough to melt the sun, blowing like something different, man, blowing like something else.



**THE RAY BRADBURY REVIEW**, a 64 page booklet edited by William F. Nolan in 1952, contains articles by Chad Oliver, Henry Kuttner, Anthony Boucher and others. In addition, it has a complete index through 1951 of all of Bradbury's reprints, anthologies, original works, radio and television sales, as well as fiction and fact by Bradbury himself.

A copy of this booklet may be had by sending one dollar to William F. Nolan, 2400 Keystone, Burbank, California.

Kris Neville's mercurial talent is difficult to pin down. He has written in every vein and mood, but we have always had a special fondness for Neville's simple, poetic stories in which he reveals human truths, illuminating the lonely, uncertain animal that is Man. His emotionally-shattering novelette, *Bettyann* (first published in 1951, in *New Tales of Space and Time*), is a perfect example of Neville's ability to make us care for his people, for the agonizingly-real characters he creates. A folk-song enthusiast, one-time radio operator, mess-man in the Merchant Marine, university English major, laborer in scientific vineyards — Kris has been writing, off and on, for the last 15 years. In this haunting, bittersweet love story the Neville word-magic weaves its subtle spell, and we are convinced that the overworked adjective *unforgettable* most certainly applies here.

## AS HOLY AND ENCHANTED

*Kris Neville*

For him, spring mornings had a character all their own, an indefinable essence that the mornings of the other seasons never had. And the best spring morning of all was a Sunday spring morning — when he awoke in time to hear the sleepy chirping of the English sparrows in the false dawn, when he loved to lie in bed, sleepy-warm, and smell the sweet, new air and dream lazy dreams.

Then, beyond the skyline of dingy buildings, when the heavens began to color rose, he would get out of bed and yawn and expect, secretly, that today something very

fine and wonderful was going to happen to him.

Those mornings, he would put on his only suit, somewhat shiny from use, his favorite blue tie, a clear-sky blue, clean shoes and, whistling, hurry out to meet the sun so that he would not lose another minute of the wonderful new day.

He always went first to the park. The park, before all the people came, was very quite and peaceful. There was soft, lacy dew on the grass. And always, as he felt the trees around him, he imagined that he was far away from the city

and in the midst of some delicate virginity, pure and sweet. The noises of civilization faded. The squirrels came out and chattered in the treetops. Occasionally he would hear the soft plunk of an acorn dropped from above. The birds' songs were clear. And the little, burbling fountain was surrounded by cooing pigeons who sidled away, unafraid, to let him pass.

One particular Sunday morning, the fairest yet of all the year, when he came to the edge of his park, he was aware, more intensely than ever before, that this was the day for the strange, wonderful thing to happen to him. As he walked along, the knowledge became unbearably sweet within him, and it made the inside of his nose tickle with emotion.

The sun was fronted by the skyline, for it was newly risen. The air was fresh as only the air of spring can be, filled with the scents of new-born flowers.

He stepped from the gravel path upon which he had been walking and onto the springy grass; his mind was alive with the delicious sensation of secrecy. He imagined that this, his short-cut to the burbling fountain, was mysteriously concealed from others and belonged to him alone.

He did not walk either too slow or too swift; slow enough to be conscious of all the sounds around

him and all the little life movements; swift enough to satisfy his urge to hurry on and meet the wonderful thing that would be sure to be waiting for him among the pigeons.

All at once, rudely shattering his thoughts, he heard an unusual, frantic fluttering from a treetop to his left. He turned his head in time to see a brown sparrow dropping toward the earth, desperately trying to break its fall.

At the first instantaneous image, he felt sorry for it; scarcely with thought, he walked to where it lay on the grass, hoping there might be some way he could help it.

The sparrow was panting and, seeing the man-form, it fluttered its wings in fear.

He bent quickly to pick it up; it cheep-cheeped shrilly. He was very careful not to hurt it. He could feel its tiny heart beating against the palm of his hand. Gently as he could, he felt of its wings and its legs to see if they were broken and was relieved to find that they were not.

"Hello."

The girl's voice was very sweet and very startling. Sweet because of some melodious quality, like that of a native ballad singer; startling because he had thought himself alone.

In surprise, he opened his hand; the sparrow fluttered and then flew. He stared at his hand, at the

## AS HOLY AND ENCHANTED

disappearing bird, and then turned to the speaker.

"You did fix him," the girl said. "I was sure you were going to, and that's why I spoke."

He felt a shuddery current, something like fear, although strangely pleasant, creep up his spine. She was a beautiful girl, lithe and slender, and straight as a Georgia pine. Her hair was sunrise gold; her eyes, the brown of hazel nuts; and her teeth flashed white in a quick, easy smile that reminded him of polar snow.

"I'm Mona," she said, holding out her slim, white hand to him.

Slowly he reached out to meet the hand. It felt warm and firm in his. He continued to stare blankly into her face, and then, realizing that he was being very impolite, he felt his face begin to redden.

"Hello," he said, for want of anything better to say.

She withdrew her hand; he felt the absence of it sharply.

"What's your name?" she asked. Her voice was like no voice he had ever heard; it was open and vibrant and warm and friendly and thrilling.

"I'm—I'm Nick."

"Nick," she said, "Nick," drawing out the word as if she were taking it apart with her voice and finding all the hidden layers of meaning in it. "I like that name." Then, seeing that he was still watching her, she smiled with pleasure and pir-

ouetted skillfully on the grass, making her snow-white skirt billow out with the movement, holding her arms wide apart. She ended up facing him again. "It is a beautiful dress, isn't it?"

He said, "Yes; it's a beautiful dress."

She laughed, and her laughter was like little bells, or like the silvery tinkle of a fast-flowing mountain brook. She tossed her head, making her hair flash out around it in a momentary, magic halo.

"You're—beautiful, too," he said. Immediately, he was chilled by the thought that she might turn and run away like a frightened faun.

"Do you really think so?"

"You're more beautiful than anything I've ever seen," he said.

She laughed again, and then she was beside him, her hand lightly resting upon his arm. He could smell the flower-fresh nearness of her; his throat swelled when she looked up into his face.

"I hoped you'd like me," she said.

He felt lost in her eyes, her beautiful, brown eyes. He said nothing, for there was nothing to say, and numbness was in his mind.

"Where were you going, just now?" she asked.

"Oh, just walking. Over to the fountain. The pigeons all come down to drink, early in the morn-

ing, before the people come . . ." Her smile was warm. "You know the fountain with the pigeons around it?" he finished, having lost the thread of thought in her smile.

"No," she said. "I don't belong here." And then she said, as if it explained everything, "I belong in Nebraska and Australia."

"Oh," he said.

"Which way is the fountain? I'd love to see it; it must be quite pretty if you like it."

"It's—it's just a fountain . . . I'll—I'll show it to you, if you want me to."

"Of course I do."

And the two of them, her hand lightly on his arm, began to walk through the park.

"You're the first one I've met down here," she said. "I was so in hopes I'd meet some of us; it's lonely with no one to talk to."

"Yes," he said, "I know. I'm often lonely."

Her eyes turned serious-sympathetic. "I'm sorry," she said, and her voice was full of understanding in a way he had never imagined possible. "I'm very sorry, Nick . . ." And then, with a little shout of joy, "Oh! That must be your wonderful fountain."

"Yes," he said. Only now it did not seem so wonderful. He wanted to show her all the things more wonderful. He thought of the sunrise on tall mountains, and the flat, level blue of the ocean off Hawaii,

and the burning of pine logs in a New England fireplace when the snow lay piled outside and the air was sharp, and the high, tumbling waterfalls in Africa that broke into rainbow spray, and all the other marvelous things he had read about during all his life.

She ran from him, scattering the startled pigeons, who fluttered a few feet and immediately resumed their endless search for food, to sit down on the old stone rim of the fountain. She dipped her hand lightly in the water; she drew it along with a free, graceful movement that was like a caress. "It feels so nice," she said. "I like water very much. Clear water. Like rain." She stared dreamily into it. "I work with water every day—almost—and yet: It's always so beautiful."

He had not moved. "*You're* beautiful," he said again in child-like wonder, knowing that to say it would not make her run away. Smiling, she took his hand and drew him, with gentle pressure, to the stones of the fountain. The pigeons, cooing softly, opened a little aisle for them that closed as soon as they had passed.

"Sit down, Nicky," she said.

For a moment she sat there beside him, silent, staring into the unquiet water, seeing the flicker and gleam of darting goldfish outlined sharply against the green of the gently waving moss. The fall-

## AS HOLY AND ENCHANTED

ing water sprayed and dimpled the surface, making the fish seem fluidly unreal.

He watched the mirrored mood on her face.

"I think you have one of the best jobs," she said.

Instinctively, he looked away from her and stared into the burbling fountain, too. Thinking of his job made him briefly miserable. His face grew hot. Then he was afraid she would see that he was ashamed. That made it all the worse. He hoped she was still staring into the water.

Looking back at her, he saw that she seemed dainty, fragile, somehow like a delicate crystal that would shatter with the first rumble of horizon thunder. He knew he must never say anything she did not want him to say — or she might go away, and he would never see her again.

"It's all right," he said.

"I think it's the most wonderful job," she insisted gently.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I suppose it really is."

Suddenly she asked, "Did you notice the sunrise this morning?"

"Yes," he said.

"It was a beautiful sunrise. Robert does them for Nebraska — do you know him? — and he's very good — but this one, this morning: I think they must use more colors, down here."

He felt his throat constrict. He

felt cold inside. He said, "I think they must," and waited.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad I met you," she said, smiling up at him. She held out both of her hands, and he took them in his.

"Hazel eyes," he said, "beautiful hazel eyes."

"Nicky," she said, "could you get off? I have the whole week here."

"I—I—."

"And you could show me the city—if you wanted to—that would be fun—don't you think so?—do you often go into the city at all?—and take me dancing, and—it would be just wonderful if you could."

She sprang away from him, laughing, humming a little, sad-funny tune that he had never heard. "I'm a very good dancer." And she spun in a series of intricate steps, executed with happy grace.

When she ceased, her cheeks were rosy from her efforts, and her breath came quickly. "Please," she held out her hand. "Let's walk, and you can talk to me, and I can talk to you, and neither of us will be lonely."

He stood, and she came to him. "Lead me," she said. "Show me your wonderful park."

They began to walk. She chattered happily, occasionally looking up at him for approval, talking of the trees and birds and the wind and the grass and the change of the seasons. She talked in youth

and enthusiasm. Once she paused to laugh at a gray squirrel, and it looked down at her quizzically, over the acorn it was holding in its forepaws.

He listened and half listened and sometimes only heard the sweet melody of her voice, rising and falling, reminding him of the pleasant wind in the scented trees and the quiet sea.

Time moved, or stood still, or was not; it did not matter.

Then, in their aimless walk, they came to the edge of the park and looked out on the city.

"Oh! How very big and pretty. And exciting! Do you often go out there, Nicky?"

"Quite often," he said, wanting to go back into the park, afraid that the city would break and shatter her.

"It must be fun—to be where you're able to. You'll show it to me, won't you? You promised, remember? And tell me about it? About the buildings? And the streets?"

"Yes," he said, taking her hand; she squeezed in soft, answering pressure. "If you really want to see it."

Like two little children, hand in hand, they walked down into the city.

Their feet made the sharp clatter of the city; the Sunday traffic made the subdued roar of the city; the people's voices made the dry-

sadness of the city.

Her questions came quickly, tumbling over themselves in flying curiosity, jumping with the speed of thought from subject to subject. He answered them all, softly, quietly, as if talking to a little girl who was first seeing the city and trying to know it all in a single hour. It gave him a sweet sense of belonging, and her eager wonder at his knowledge filled him with a pride and joy he had never known.

"Here," he said, pointing to a new-shiny building, with doors gleaming with brass and windows sparkling with sunshine. "This. It's built on the very spot where an ancient, Spanish monastery once stood."

"You know so very much. About the strangest things — about these people."

"I come here often," he said.

"... We've been walking for a long time," she said.

"Are you tired?"

"Not very."

"Neither am I," he said.

"No; you only get tired when you're lonely; and we're not . . ." Her voice trailed away. "Look, Nicky! A tree . . . It seems funny to see a tree here, among all these buildings: like it was growing out of the pavement instead of the ground."

"Yes; it does seem like that," he said.

## AS HOLY AND ENCHANTED

"I wonder if it's a happy tree; do you think so, Nicky?"

"I guess it is . . ."

A silence.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

". . . Are you?"

"Yes," he said, "Let's go eat."

"All right." She laughed lightly. "That sounds like fun."

When, shortly, they arrived at the door of a restaurant, he said, "Go on in."

"It'll be all right?" she asked doubtfully.

"Of course."

He guided her to a table and, when they ordered, she followed his lead, saying what he said, watching the waitress cautiously, out of the corner of her eye.

"I don't know how you do it," she said, looking up after the girl had left their table. "I'd be afraid to death, if you weren't with me."

"You get used to it," he said.

"Of course you do . . . Nicky? I'd love to live here—where I could come into the city — do all these wonderful things — whenever I wanted to."

"Would you really like to live here?" he asked, and his voice sounded dry and strained.

"Oh, very much, Nicky. I'd love to live here—almost better than anything." And having said that, she was suddenly very shy; she looked down at the snowy table-cloth and ran her fingertips over it.

He was not sure of what to say;

the palms of his hands were moist. And he was glad when the lunch arrived:

After the waitress left, they looked up and stared into each other's eyes.

"Well," he said, looking down at the food, "it looks all right to me."

"Yes," she said, "It's just fine."

There was a motionless silence. "Does it snow often, here?"

"Snow?" He put down his knife across the edge of his plate. ". . . Hasn't for years. Last time was forty-three, I think."

"Oh, yes," she said. "I remember, now."

When the lights in the theater went off, she stiffened. And, with the first trumpet jar of the newsreel music, she said, "Ohh," very softly. After that, for a few minutes, she was on the edge of her seat, watching wide-eyed. Once she said, "Oh, Nicky, look!"

But soon she settled down and rested her head on his shoulder. He slipped his arm around her. It seemed natural that he should. She moved closer to him; her hand found his. She made a little noise, deep in her throat, like a purr. "I like this," she whispered. "Better than anything I've ever done."

He kissed her silken hair, knew the electric nearness of her, and nothing else mattered.

When the movie was over, they walked again; sunset brooded in the west; the air was warm and exotic, as if blowing from the far away, from a never, never land of strange, perfumed flowers. And the day had been long and sweet.

The cab swung into the paved semi-circle before the tall building. They got out. In the dim light, her dress glowed whitely; she stared up and up, her eyes widening with the vast height of the building.

"It's on the roof," he whispered to her, as soon as he had paid the cab.

"I'm—I'm afraid," she half whimpered.

"It's only a dance," he said.

They walked into the hotel and through the huge lobby, feeling, in that moment, alone against the world. She pressed to him as if for protection. Beautifully dressed people moved around them, so rich with assurance.

They crossed the foyer; they entered the elevator with an elderly man in a tuxedo; "The Top," the man said, as if he were accustomed to saying it.

Nick wondered if he had enough money. He had heard that this was an expensive place.

"Ohhhh," she said as the elevator began to move.

The elderly gentleman looked at her strangely.

Nick patted her arm and smiled at her; she smiled back, uncer-

tainly.

When the elevator sighed to a stop, the operator slid open the door. The three passengers stepped out.

The sight of the room, the music; the muted sigh of conversation; the lights; the women with their jewelry; the reflection in the curved mirror of the bar; the smell of food; the deep, blood-red, silencing carpet.

She seemed overcome with the bright glitter of it. He felt cold and a little frightened with the strange glamor of it. It was something like a movie set; unreal, like that, to him. He wondered how the men moved with such poise.

After a few moments, the head waiter came to them; he raised his eyebrows as if to ask if they had a reservation, then he seemed to reconsider. "A table for two, sir?" he asked.

"Yes . . . Please," Nick said.

"If you'll come this way, sir . . . ?"

And they were seated. The table was small and secluded.

He sat very stiffly, waiting, very conscious of his shiny suit. She turned immediately toward the dance floor. She watched the dancing bodies mold together in a waltz rhythm; she swayed with them, and her eyes were wide and starry with rapt attention. She turned back to him. "I never knew it was this wonderful," she said, "and it almost makes you wish . . ."

## AS HOLY AND ENCHANTED

"Wish what?" he asked, after a moment.

She studied his face as if memorizing it; her eyes seemed suddenly turned sad. "Nothing, Nicky," she said.

Eventually, the silent waiter handed them huge, elaborate menus.

He glanced at his and felt a momentary sickness; it passed, and he was ashamed of it.

"Champagne," he said, because he had read that men who felt as he did should buy champagne for the girl they felt that way about.

The waiter bowed. "Yes, sir." He began to name champagnes.

Nick listened, repeated the fifth name after the waiter; he hoped it would be all right.

When they were alone again, he looked across at her.

"Darling," he said, surprised at his own courage.

"Yes?" Her lips were shining red.

"Darling, I . . . I . . ." He knew perfectly well what he wanted to say. He was annoyed to find that his voice refused to respond. The moment passed. "Do you like champagne?" he finished desperately.

"I don't know. Do you?"

"It's—all right."

"If it's what you like, I'll like it too," she said.

After the wine was in their glasses, he raised his and sipped to

her.

"It's all funny-bubbly and sour," she said. Then hastily, "But I like it, Nicky; I really do."

His hand curled the stem of his glass; the vessel seemed springily cushioned on the heavy whiteness of the tablecloth.

"Nick," she said. "Every minute's been wonderful." Color came into her cheeks.

He looked down at the rising, breaking bubbles and spoke to them softly. "I don't know how to say this. I've never said it before. I wouldn't say it to any other girl, ever." He was surprised to hear the words; and glad and afraid. "Mona," he said, "I'm in love with you." He did not look up.

There was silence; he thought he heard her sigh, wistfully.

"Nicky, Nicky. I knew I loved you when I saw you there, fixing that poor, little bird."

He looked up, then.

"But Nick," she said, "I'm afraid that you . . ."

"No. Don't spoil it. Don't say anything. Right now. We'll have to say things later. Be still and listen, now."

They listened; and then they danced; they danced on a carpet of clouds.

"Hold me tight," she whispered, "very tight, and say that you love me."

She danced airy and delicate and snuggled warmly and her

white dress flowed in animated grace, coming alive around her.

The room glided away and back, to the dip and swoop of the waltz, and she followed him, her head thrown back slightly, her lips half parted, her eyes lightly closed and fluttering.

He found himself dancing slowly toward the door and out of the room, onto the open terrace, into the pale light of the waning moon. It seemed she had led him, very gently.

They stopped dancing, and walked to the edge and looked down on the city sparkling there under them.

He turned to her, looked down into her wonderful eyes, and the stars of the city and the sky, too, were there.

Her face seemed alive with the moment, in a life drawn from all the wonderful, eloquent silences of vast nature; her delicately molded features were impossibly perfect; and her skin was smooth and life-blood warm. And yet, there was sadness there, too.

"Mona," he whispered, "will you marry me?"

"I—don't know," she breathed softly. "Oh, Nick, I do so hope so!"

"I don't understand," he said.

"I—want—to," she said very slowly. "Only I couldn't come down here. You see, I only know one job. But maybe, in a little while, in just a few years, you could get a

transfer and come to Nebraska."

"Mona," he said, "you wouldn't have to work." He felt her stiffen in his arms. "Of course, at first, it might be hard." He went on talking, but he knew she wasn't listening. "But I can get promotions; I know I can, if I have you to work for . . . I'm not making much now, but maybe in a couple of years, I'll be a foreman, and then . . ."

She drew away. "Oh, Nick, oh, no." Her voice was a choked sob. "I thought . . ." She checked herself. "And then I was afraid that you . . ." She looked up at him and said, in a whisper, "Nick, what is your job?"

"It isn't much, now, darling, but . . ."

"Please, Nick, what is it?"

"I'm a mechanic," he said; it made him feel miserable; because he knew that was not what she wanted to hear.

She moaned. "I was—afraid . . . No. I guess I knew, down deep, from the first, that you weren't . . . But I wouldn't believe it. I wouldn't let myself believe it. In the city, I was almost sure, once, but I couldn't ask you. When—I saw you—in the park—with that—that bird, I thought your job was to—to fix all the little birds and animals that got hurt—and then when you said, 'before the people come to the fountain', I was almost sure, for a little while, and then after-

## AS HOLY AND ENCHANTED

wards, I was afraid to ask, when I wasn't sure any more."

"Mona," he said, "please . . . you're talking nonsense."

She shook her head. "No, Nick. Not nonsense."

She began to cry. She stood very still and very straight. Her lower lip trembled. "It's been the most wonderful day ever; and I'll never forget it. Not ever."

"Nick," she said, very softly, "I'm sorry I did this to you." She started to put out her hand to caress his face, and then drew it back without touching him.

He swallowed and wanted to touch her and take her in his arms

and say, "It's a dream, what you're saying, you don't mean it, you're just teasing me and you . . ." But he said, "Mona, Mona, what is your job?" And he said it so low that she could scarcely hear him.

She looked deep into his eyes, and her lip was quivering.

"Oh, Nick. Darling." Her voice was an eerie whisper now. "I make snowflakes."

Suddenly he was alone.

He turned his eyes up to the mute stars. And he felt something soft and wet strike against his hot face; they were like gentle kisses.

He knew what they were.



In mid-December of 1958, based on the sale of his first novel, John Tomerlin walked away from his job at a Los Angeles advertising agency to embark on a writing career. Now, four and a half years later, he has published a second novel (*Return to Vikki*, from Gold Medal), sold short fiction overseas, written a dozen profiles and as many articles (one of the best of these having appeared in *True*) — and has professionally placed three screenplays and over 30 teleplays in the entertainment industry for *Thriller*; *Lawman*; *Wanted, Dead or Alive*; etc. Tomerlin was a crack radio sports announcer for a number of years, and still puts this talent to use at local sports car races in the Southern California area; he has also won trophies in various forms of wheeled competition (once nosing out the Mayor of Bakersfield in a jalopy race!) — and is the husband of a very attractive Scottish lass, who happens to be an excellent typist. ("She's the best secretary a man could marry!") Tomerlin's fiction is smooth and seemingly effortless (the result, as every writer knows, of many hours at the typewriter), and in the example at hand he operates on many subtle levels. It is up to each reader to interpret this story on a personal basis; we can only say we found it to be a sensitive, probing example of how to blend the past with the present. Read it and judge for yourself.

## SHADE OF DAY

*John Tomerlin*

Grey Allison slowed his car abruptly at the sight of the familiar street post: Barnham Avenue, he was sure that was it. There were still a couple of hours to be disposed of, and having no better place to go he turned right, onto the narrow road, and drove between rows of prim houses toward the mist-draped, mint green foothills. Almost immediately, he

wished he hadn't. It would be just his luck to run into somebody he'd known. He'd feel like a fool, trying to explain that only idleness had brought him here, that he wasn't some damned, nostalgic elephant coming home to die. The simile made him wince: he would know, quite soon now, whether he was going to die or not.

He had felt all right when he

## SHADE OF DAY

arrived in San Francisco, a trifle sickish perhaps but planes scared him, and it wasn't until he'd checked into his hotel that the pain began: an aching in his chest that seemed to sear his body with every pulsebeat. He hadn't worried too much. He'd had such attacks before — chronic myocarditis the doctors called it — but this time had been worse. He'd stayed in bed, sweating in an atmosphere made heavy by low clouds and a thin, warm rain. He'd cancelled his business appointment with Ferguson (no telling what that might cost him), then remembered the name of the doctor he'd gone to as a child. He inquired of Information the listing for Dr. Charles Nathan in San Mateo.

"I'm sure you wouldn't want me to lie to you," Nathan had said, though Grey himself was less sure (was it wise to frighten a man with a heart condition?). ". . . strongly suspect . . . aneurism . . . hospital can verify . . ." It was all nonsense. He knew what was wrong with him, it wasn't dangerous. But, ". . . can go along for years with no trouble, and then —" a snap of fingers, a shrug, Nathan had scared him into it, until he'd finally agreed to enter the hospital for examination the following afternoon.

This morning, the pain had been all but gone. Several times he had decided, "The hell with Nathan,

and the hell with his hospital . . . I'll finish my business and get out of here," but he hadn't been able to do it, or even summon the resolution to call Ferguson for another appointment. It was as though some profound part of his being warned of something wrong. Not instinct; he didn't believe in it; but a purely physical, *corporeal* perception that communicated itself to the brain. Yes, Nathan had made him afraid all right. He ended by taking his rental car and driving down the peninsula to look at the little city where he'd grown up.

Most of it was unrecognizable. The stores where he had met friends (bought ice cream, read comics, stolen lead soldiers) were either gone or altered to meaninglessness. His mind felt sterile, adrift on a polished plain of rejection, alone somewhere between a life that no longer seemed real and a death that could not be imagined. He was an alien here, and had begun to wonder if he hadn't always been, so that the name on the street sign reached out to him like an opening in an otherwise blank wall.

He drove toward the hills about a mile. There, just where it should have been (or, perhaps, after 25 years, where it *shouldn't* have been), he found the aging, two-story building, its yellow plaster dark with moisture, its maroon

window trim chipping in layers and peeling away from old, almost black wood. He pulled to the curb and shut off the motor. The radio, connected to the ignition, went dead at the same time, and all he could hear was the sizzling of rain on the metal roof and on the pavement outside.

He tried to jeer at the emotion that passed through him at the sight of Beresford Junior High. He'd always been scornful of those who went back to their old schools, returning like ghosts to stir the bones of their so-called carefree years. He thought it was a fraud: going to reunions and pretending to have something in common; measuring lies; shaking hands with poor, youth-eroded instructors to show them the wealth and success they'd spawned but could never share. A notice had reached him once, years ago (after his picture had appeared in some local paper), advising him that the Acappella Society would meet the week prior to Christmas, inviting him to attend. He had wanted to go and sing second tenor as he once had, and the solo part in *Te Deum*, but he'd put the letter aside and when he came across it again, the date had passed. For a time he'd wondered whether he was sorry or not. But the truth (why not admit it?) was that he was afraid. Afraid it might turn out that only *he* was a fraud. What if

the others came in good cars, wearing good clothes, leading good, plump, genuinely-contented wives? He could pretend, of course, but he would *know* he was pretending, and he couldn't afford that. That account, like the rest, was already over-drawn.

Not that it mattered so much any more: he knew what his chances were (Nathan hadn't lied about that, either) if it was an aneurism. Right now he wanted to see the inside of the building and find out if it, too, was unchanged. He got out of the car, hunching his shoulders against the steady drizzle, and crossed the street to the red cement steps. The stairs led to a broad porte-cochere that was vaulted by three symmetrical arches, each with a rusted chain and brass-frame lamp descending from it. Beneath were heavy, wooden doors with tarnished hand-bar openers folded across their middles like thin, disciplinarian arms. The bar of the door Grey entered seemed warm to his touch as he pushed against it and went inside.

The foyer was small and badly lighted, empty except for some folded wooden chairs stacked along one wall and a large glass case full of cups, emblems, photographs of ball teams. The hallways lay in the form of a cross, the longer member running left and right from where he stood.

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The shorter one led from the main entrance, behind Grey, to an exit with steps down to the playground. At the top of the cross was the school office, and, down the main aisle, the doors of classrooms from which a steady hive-drone issued. Amazing how everything seemed the same; not just familiar, but the *same*: the floors were still dark-brown linoleum—replaced, possibly in the course of years, but replaced identical so that even the countless indentations of heels and metal-capped shoes (were his footprints among them?) remained timeless. He felt he might have walked on his way to class the day before. He went over to the bulletin board, near the main office, and studied one of the mimeographed sheets hanging from it. He didn't hear the door as it opened behind him:

"Can I help you?" a voice said.

He turned to see a plainly-dressed man of more than middle age. "No, thanks," Grey said, "I was just looking around. I—used to go here," he added, qualifying himself.

The man nodded. "My name is Hirschman. I'm the principal here."

"Oh? It was someone else—" he hesitated, rummaging for the name; odd; he was sure it had occurred to him recently.

"Christy?"

He shook his head.

"Before that was Mr. Warwick."

"That's it. Warwick." He laughed nervously, wondering: how could he have forgotten?

"Would you like me to show you around?"

"Don't bother, I haven't got much time." That sounded too final. "Have to be in San Mateo at 3:30 to—see my doctor." The older man began to turn away. "Would it be all right if I just walked around a little?"

"Of course. Stop by my office before you leave, if you have time. There might be something you'd like to look up in the records." Hirschman went down the hall toward the auditorium, his small, ill-clad frame looking more rounded and stooped from a distance. Not like Warwick. Warwick had been straight as a soldier.

Grey walked down the short south hallway, to the wire-in-glass doors at the end. It had stopped raining, and he went outside to a concrete landing that overlooked the playground. A row of low, modern classrooms extended along the boundary to his right, and more of the grounds were paved than in his time, but everything else was as he remembered it: courts for basketball, volleyball, handball just where they'd always been. Here, on these steps, he'd received his graduation certificate, and the memory of it brought back a sudden, sharp image: Warwick,

standing at the top step, a short man with thin, straight hair and a habit of jerking his chin up abruptly and twisting his head from side to side as though his collar were strangling him. And himself, mounting these steps in line with his classmates, thinking of something else entirely (a bit of adolescent scatology to commemorate their final day) as he took his certificate in his left hand while leaving the right free to receive the principal's customary, solemn grasp. Warwick had been smiling a fixed, functional smile, and had said, in a very low voice that no one else could hear: "You'll never get through high school, Grey." "Thank you," he'd responded automatically (not even ironically) and walked down the opposite steps. He went down the same steps, now, to the vacant, still-wet asphalt, and crossed what had been known as the Assembly Area, toward the volleyball courts.

"You'll never get through high school, Grey." Why had he said that, and why had the remark stayed to trouble him so long? He had gotten through high school, as a matter of fact, and had sometimes thought he would like to find Warwick and tell him, "You see? you were wrong you supercilious —"

But he knew he wouldn't say any such thing. Warwick had been wrong only in a specific sense, not

in a general one. Perhaps he'd been trying to warn Grey of something; tell him what lay ahead; of the "almost opportunities," the "near misses," the "just-too-lates" that would fill his life. Could he have foretold the dragging days that would seem to Grey like a succession of escapes from Nemesis? Or the feeling of living in a tight, dark cell while breathing out the last of its air? No, he would say nothing to the man if he met him again, nothing at all. Even though he would want to ask, "How did you know? What did you see in me then?"

A bell rang inside the buildings, and, a moment later, the doors along the line of new classrooms slammed open. Scores of children spilled out to the walks and rushed toward the main building like grains of sand before a fitful wind. None seemed to notice Grey, though he stood only a few yards from them, his back to a pole that supported one end of the frayed and drooping volleyball net. The eyes of the few who glanced his way past him, through him, as though he were invisible.

He thought: "Perhaps, to them, I am." He couldn't remember, as a child, having seen adults wandering about the grounds, yet it must have happened often — men like himself, returning to look at the old school. He thought of his own simile and smiled: "We're ghosts,"

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he told himself, and added, "A man has no place in his own past."

Two boys came out of one of the rooms, lagging behind the rest. They had been quarreling, apparently. One of them—a dark-haired boy of medium height—walked quickly, as though trying to break away, while the other followed giving him a push every few steps, slapping his shoulder in challenge. Grey watched the dark-haired boy with something like recognition, knowing the familiar stomach-sick humiliation of retreat. "Don't walk away," he thought suddenly, anxiously, "for God's sake, don't!" He considered running after the boy and telling him (why did he seem so familiar?) not to turn his back—not ever, but the two reached the building and, an instant later, disappeared from sight. Grey turned away, eyes burning, and walked toward the far end of the grounds that was limited by a line of eucalyptus trees.

Could it make any difference? Any real difference? Sure, he'd dodged fights from time to time but it wasn't because he'd been afraid; not exactly. He'd had a fight here, once, near these trees, with grass and dirt underfoot instead of pavement. A boy named Harry had been tormenting him for weeks, but he had avoided the clash somehow (that wasn't important), until one afternoon he'd stayed late at school, and, starting

to cross the grounds on his way home, had found Harry waiting for him. "You're chicken," the boy had told him, "you're yellow!" When, to his amazement, he'd found himself sitting on top of his opponent, he hadn't known what to do next. Harry had refused to give up; had tried to bite his hand. "You bite me, I'll hit you in the face!" Harry had bitten him, and he'd hit the boy in the face, hard. "I give!"

He'd felt good, even though there'd been no one there to see the fight. Grey realized, abruptly, that *this* was what he'd feared; not being beaten, but having others see it. He would have fought every boy who ever challenged him, win or lose, if only no one witnessed his defeats. But there hadn't been anything else wrong with him.

He'd been good at team games—a fine football player, and always first to be chosen at volleyball. (Because there were others to share the blame if they lost?) He'd been active in school politics, too, though never a candidate. (Why?) Once, he'd formed an entente with some friends and staged a real campaign for the class presidency; they'd picked a shy, intellectual boy named Marion Something-or-other, whom they'd thought they could dominate; when the boy became too independent, Grey had decided to impeach him.

He had collected almost enough signatures when Warwick got wind of it and called him in and tore up the petition, calling him a "sneak." He'd never thought of himself as a sneak, merely as preferring to work behind the scenes. (Out of harm's way?)

"You're nothing but a little sneak," someone called the next day — somehow, it was all over the school. But he had been amazed to hear a note of respect, even awe, in the jibes. One of the teachers who had merely disliked him before seemed actually to hate him, now, and there was something good in the very virulence of her dislike—better than disinterest or apathy. How could he have failed to see it before?

He had reached the fence at the end of the yard. To his right, the ground rose sharply to a higher level. Paved, now, instead of bare earth, the embankment seemed strange for a moment, then he remembered it: the "plateau," a favorite spot for eating lunches, with the added attraction of the great, plank-sided cistern at one end that provided water to the school. The fact that the cistern had been fenced, declared off-limits, had not kept Grey and others from climbing its mossy sides and peering into its dark, threatening depths ("S'pose a kid fell in and nobody knew and we all drank some of the water?"). Wondering

if the cistern was still there, he began to climb the steep slope.

He was very glad he had come. He felt he had discovered something important; something that might alter him, make him new: watching the boy (he recognized him, at last), the memories of his own defeats and victories (for there *had* been victories: a prize for selling the most war bonds, his team winning the district championship, a party where he'd kissed Marilyn who had the biggest breasts — almost the only breasts, really — of any girl in the class) — all of it seemed full of meaning. He thought: "This is where it started. If anything is to be changed, this is where it must begin." Not that it would be that simple; nothing in life was that simple; he knew it, and still —

He would start with the little things: he would call Ferguson that afternoon, from the hospital, and instead of pretending he didn't need the order (the way he usually did, so that no disappointment could show), he would say, "Mr. Ferguson, I want your business, I need it, and I intend to get it." So what if he were turned down? it was nothing to be ashamed of. When he got home, he would call every one of his creditors, yes, and the friends he owed money, and tell them, "I haven't got a dime right now, and I don't make as much as I brag I do, but you'll be

## SHADE OF DAY

paid, I promise it." He was exhilarated thinking about it.

The grade was steeper than it looked, steeper, of course, than he remembered. He paused near the top to catch quick lungfuls of the biting, fog-wet air. Dizziness and nausea lashed at him and he sat down abruptly. He thought of the hospital again, and was terrified. What if they discovered —?

For a moment, the pain was very bad, and during it he had an odd sensation: warm dirt beneath his fingers, and the shout of children's voices ("First choose! First choose! . . . you're on *our* side!") and then the moment passed.

He looked at his watch: he would have to hurry if he wanted to be on time. But he walked slowly back toward the yellow building; he felt so much better, now; perhaps the whole thing was unnecessary, after all. God alone knew what it would cost, and he'd never be able to tell Wilma, no

matter how little it was.

Inside the building, he paused at the door to the principal's office, wondering if he should take the time to go in. As he stood there, the dark-haired boy hurried past him; eyes swollen, face streaked, he clawed open the door to the office and rushed inside. A moment later a woman came out, frowning, and looked down the hallway.

"Excuse me, Miss, is Mr. Hirschman —"

The woman hesitated, looked past him, then went back inside, closing the door.

Grey leaned against the bulletin board, touching one hand to his face, remembering the instant of confounding pain on the slope. Then he shook his head and thought: "I'll just wait a while." He looked at his watch and saw that it was after 3 o'clock. There was no hurry; he was too late for his appointment.



For more years than he cares to remember, the ubiquitous Forrest J. Ackerman has been known as "Mister Science Fiction." One of the "founding fathers" of the Los Angeles SF League, Ackerman has been constantly active in the field as fan, agent, collector, film columnist, editor, bookseller, and occasional short-storyist. A few seasons back he began to edit *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, delving into his vast collection of fantasy/sf movie stills to supply FMF's readers with many rare shots of film heavies, from Lou Chaney to Vincent Price. Now this magazine is a solid commercial success, with many imitators. Unless one has actually seen Forry's fabulous "Ackermansion" in West Los Angeles it is difficult to envision this vast storehouse of sf lore. Here, by the ton, is the product of science fiction since its debut in 1926: books and magazines in the tens of thousands, drawings, photos, recordings, original manuscripts, mementos, horror masks, fanzines . . . a truly staggering sf paradise which Ackerman adds to day by day. "When I expire," he says, "this place will become a museum. Its doors will never close to fans." We at GAMMA 1 feel that a new magazine such as ours would be incomplete without an Ackerman contribution. Thus, we give you this tart tale of invisibility, demonstrating that *not* seeing is believing.

## THE GIRL WHO WASN'T THERE

*Forrest J. Ackerman*

The invisible girl continued: "The day the little woman selling cosmetics came to the door I never would have let her in, except — well, it was my eighteenth birthday, and I was feeling very grown-up and self-assured. You see, my parents were dead, and I lived with my aunt and uncle. They were very strict — never allowed me to use lipstick or nail polish, even when I went to high school

and all my girlfriends wore makeup. My aunt had given me ten dollars for my birthday, and told me I could spend it for anything I wanted. I suppose she thought I'd buy books with it. I had a marvelous collection of fiction and non-fiction on witchcraft, sorcery . . . oh, everything that was rather off-trail or unusual. Funny, my aunt and uncle were terribly strict; I wasn't even allowed to go out

## THE GIRL WHO WASN'T THERE

on a date, but they didn't seem to mind what company I kept in authors."

An indignant sniff rustled dust motes in the air, and I found myself feeling sympathy for the girl. I wondered what she looked like, if she were pretty or homely. I reached out and took her invisible hand gently in mine. It was a soft, feminine hand, very reassuring in its solidity. I was glad we were the only ones sitting in the bus that evening as it sped through the city streets. We were far enough from the driver so he wouldn't think I was talking to myself.

"You poor kid," I said sympathetically.

"Anyway," she went on, "when this weird little old woman came to the door with her array of cosmetics, it seemed to me like a wonderful opportunity to assert my rights at last as a free individual and do what I pleased. My aunt and uncle happened to be out for a few hours, so I invited the little old lady inside.

"You know the old witch in *Hansel and Gretel*? Well, this woman looked like a modern version of her, only she had a pleasant, mischievous twinkle in her slanted green eyes. Any misgivings I might have had about her were quickly banished when she opened her case and laid out the most enticing rainbow display of

bottles, jars and flasks.

"She winked at me. 'This is the first time you've ever bought cosmetics, isn't it?' I told her it was, but asked how she knew. 'Oh, I can tell a lot about people, you'd be surprised.' I had the strange feeling she could gaze deep inside my miserable little soul, that she sensed that I was lonely and unhappy in my unnatural, sheltered life with an aunt and uncle who could never understand me or give me the love that real parents could.

"I finally ended up by buying a box of face powder, an odd little bottle of perfume, a lipstick, and a jar of face cream. The funny thing was, she insisted on presenting me with an extra large size jar of the cream, and she wouldn't accept any money for it. Said it was a gift from her for my eighteenth birthday. I didn't remember until afterward that I hadn't told her it was my birthday.

"When my aunt and uncle returned, they were furious. My aunt immediately took the cosmetics and threw them in the trash barrel. I rushed to my room and locked myself in. Then I cried and cried. It was too utterly humiliating. A girl my age being denied the use of a few harmless cosmetics.

"I must have fallen asleep. I awoke about a quarter of twelve. The house was silent. My aunt

and uncle always retired at 9:00, and I knew they'd be sleeping. I was in a defiant mood, so I got out of bed and cautiously crept downstairs in the dark.

"At the trash barrel the spicy fragrance of the spilled perfume made me weep again at its loss as I groped among the broken bits of glass. It was hopeless to salvage the face powder. I couldn't find the lipstick in the dark, but my hands closed on the jar of facial cream — miraculously unbroken. I put it in my pocket and stole back upstairs.

"In my room I cautiously locked my door, turned on the desk lamp, and by its low light began to rub the contents of the jar methodically on my face. I was in that sort of unreasonable, irrational mood when you make all sorts of crazy, impractical resolutions. With every motion of my hand I thought 'I'll show them! They can't boss me! I even resolved to run away the very next day.

"In the distance I heard a town clock boom out the hour of midnight — the witching hour. My facial completed, I walked to the mirror to satisfy my vanity. But the sight that met my eyes left me limp with fright. I had no face! My hair was visible, and the rest of my body, but my face and neck — well, they just weren't there!

"I reached up — and discovered I could feel my face just as you

can feel my hand now, but I couldn't see it. Then I noticed a portion of my hand was invisible, too, just the fingertips, the parts that had touched the cream.

"Suddenly I felt very adventurous, and my spirits soared, for I realized that at last I'd found a way to escape. I undressed and rubbed myself from head to toe with the magic cream. When I returned to the mirror I was not disappointed: I was totally invisible!

"I was free! Free to roam where I willed, unseen. The whole city was mine!

"But I was tired and decided to wait until morning, after I'd had a good night's rest. I put on my nightgown, expecting to see the garment apparently floating in air. But the nightgown itself was now invisible. I discovered later that any object that comes into contact with me automatically vanishes. Clothing, food, and so on.

"Well, I left early the next morning. I didn't take much with me; I just wore an old sweater and skirt beneath my coat, and put on my most comfortable pair of low-heeled shoes. I didn't have much money, but I knew that I could raid the kitchen of some swank hotel or cafe. They served scrumptious meals, too, I found out!"

I heard her invisible lips smack in reminiscence. They were probably full rich red lips, I decided, and very kissable.

## THE GIRL WHO WASN'T THERE

"At night I stayed at the best hotels, sleeping in unrented rooms. It was risky, of course. Once I was surprised by a room being rented during the night." She laughed. "When I jumped out of bed, the sheets waved around like a ghost, and the poor guests nearly had heart failure.

"As for clothing or anything else I need, I just appropriate them. I hope you're not too shocked."

"Not at all," I said, squeezing her hand affectionately. "I can understand your problem. I wish I could help you."

"You have already," she said, "by just letting me talk to you like this. It's been so long since I've been able to just sit down and talk with someone so understanding."

"You could go see a doctor," I suggested.

"I thought of that," she said with a sigh, "but is this invisibility of mine science or sorcery? Besides, I couldn't stand being a guinea pig with doctors pawing over me and making examinations, and stories in the newspapers, and notoriety, and — and my aunt and uncle finding me again. . . ."

I felt her invisible hand grip my arm desperately. "Oh, you can't imagine how lonely I've been, even worse than before. You might imagine it would be a great lark. It was, at first, but not any more. I try to make friends with people,

but when I speak to them, they're afraid and think they are having hallucinations. I—I just don't know what to do."

She began to cry invisible tears, and I put my arm around her comfortingly.

"I'm sorry," she said, suddenly irritated. "It isn't *your* problem." She stood up, pulling her hand from my grasp. "I shouldn't have bothered you."

"Wait," I said, but she was already beyond reach.

The bell sounded as she invisibly pulled the stop cord, and the bus driver obediently swerved to the corner curb. The front and rear doors of the bus snapped open and I could sense the girl's invisible body going through the opening into the dark street outside.

The doors snapped shut again before I could gather my wits. She was going out of my life again just as suddenly as she came in. I couldn't lose her. Not now.

"Wait!" I cried, leaping into the aisle.

"Make up your mind, buddy," the bus driver said wearily.

The doors went open again, and I almost leaped from the bus in my haste. The bus whooshed off, and I stood there listening for a moment.

"Where are you?" I whispered into the darkness. Then louder: "Speak to me. Please speak to

## FORREST J. ACKERMAN

me."

There was no answer. She had gone.

How do you find an invisible girl? Do you put an ad in the paper? I thought of notifying the police, but I knew they'd only laugh at me.

But I *must* find her. I don't even know her name, but I do know that I love her and need her. I understand her problem — because I'm almost 20 and I live with very strict parents — just like her aunt and uncle — and they never let me do *anything*, never let me go out with girls or have any kind of fun . . .

It's lonely now without my invisible girl friend. I roam the streets at night calling out to her, begging her to answer me. I confided in a few friends, but they said it was only hallucination and that I should forget it. When I insisted she was real, they looked at me strangely.

I didn't imagine it. I couldn't have. I need her too much for that. She *was* there, she *was*, I know it.

I've got proof.

My hand — that lucky one once held delightfully imprisoned in her soft feminine grasp — is starting to turn invisible!



The first printed effort of young Ray Bradbury was a poem (back in his high school days), and it should come as no surprise to his readers to discover that he is capable of excellent verse. Nearly all of Bradbury's fiction is prose-poetry, and it is extraordinary that he has allowed only three of his poems to be published professionally over the past 23 years. "Actually, I've written a drawer full of them," he admits, "but they just aren't ready yet for anyone to see. They need more work, more polishing. Eventually, perhaps, I'll collect the best of them for publication — as I recently collected my one-act plays — but that day is a long time off." While hopefully waiting for Ray to put together his collection, GAMMA 1 presents a sample of what it will contain: a poem about Death, keenly observed and exquisitely rendered — the only Bradbury verse ever to appear in a science fiction magazine.

## DEATH IN MEXICO

*Ray Bradbury*

I thought it strange to see them on  
the path  
That led them up in sun and  
lemon-shadow

Through winds that smelled of  
summer and of wine.

I thought that they were only pass-  
ing

The delicate and fern-scrolled iron  
gates

The winter-white, the marble  
cemetery

Carrying their lunch in a little  
silver case.

Murmuring, all,  
And chattering, and smiling;

One held a soft guitar and touched

it with a whorled thumb;  
And they were dark birds wheel-  
ing south at winter's call.

I saw them chewing tangerines  
and spitting seeds,  
I saw them move, night among  
day-whitened stone.

And the food that they ate upon  
was death,

And the sustenance they bore in  
a silver box

Was the fossil imprint of a child.

They carried her like jewels over-  
head;

The father balanced her, hand up,  
gently as a plume,

A crated feather, a valley flower,  
an April grass.  
And no one wept.

But each was eating of the air and  
of the day,  
As quick, as quickly as they could.  
They ate the sky with eyes,  
And the wind with teeth,  
And the sun with their flesh;

And it was good to be alive,  
If only to be walking here  
With Death crowned upon their  
heads,  
Death delicate as moss and leaf  
mold  
Borne in a box.

Within the box was running and  
laughter and dark hair,  
Within the box was the eye of the  
antelope  
And the breath of the moon,  
Within the box a fevered but cool-  
ing apricot, a pear,  
Within the box all life that was or  
ever comes to be,  
Within the box some picnic tinsel,  
silver amulet, mountain shade.

They moved on with their mur-  
muring guitar,  
I saw the great fern shadows of  
the iron gate blow shut.  
How strange — I smiled — that I  
should think them picnicking,  
How strange to think they carried  
wine above their heads;  
For, in reality,  
Those souls were eating long be-  
fore the noon  
And long after the midnight,  
They ate forever and never stopped  
their eating.

Even as I, hurrying in an icy wind,  
Sculled down the quiet avalanche  
of cobbled street and hill  
Eating of the clear air, and drink-  
ing of the mellow wind,  
And eating of the blue sky  
And taking the golden dust with  
my mouth  
And feeding the yellow sun to my  
soul.  
I passed a coffin shop where ham-  
mers  
Were ticking like clocks.

I woke in the night so hungry that  
I wept.



## An Editorial - More or Less

You've probably noticed by now that GAMMA is not like the other science-fiction magazines. In fact, we don't even refer to it on the masthead as a science-fiction magazine. In this age when science-fiction and science-fact are so closely allied, our aim is the only logical one, as spelled out for you on the table of contents page in the subtitle: NEW FRONTIERS IN FICTION.

Does this include science-fiction? Of course. Fantasy fiction? Yes. Imaginative fiction? Definitely!

There have been editorials and articles written *ad nauseum* attempting to define science-fiction and fantasy. The conclusions have consistently been personal and thus unsatisfactory for the general reader, who had his own private ideas on the subject and really didn't care in the first place. We at GAMMA aren't going in for staid definitions, nor are we going to categorize our fiction. Instead, we intend to bring you stories that will stretch your imagination; tales of the past, the present, and the future that will make your tear ducts erupt or your face muscles unlimber into a smile — we'll even run stories that may make you angry.

One this is certain: we're not going to have a dull magazine!



At 37, with 11 books to his credit, Richard Matheson has achieved an enviable position as one of the nation's finest writers. *The Beardless Warriors*, his savage, compelling novel of teen-agers in World War II (based on his own experiences as a young replacement with the 87th Division) drew high praise—and his 75 short stories and novelettes (most of them in the sf field) have been hailed as outstanding by readers and critics alike. As an example of this, his *Playboy* novelette, *The Distributor*, won that magazine's annual \$1,000 fiction award in 1958. Matheson grew up in Brooklyn, planning to become an engineer, but after graduation from the University of Missouri (where he earned a Bachelor of Journalism degree) he changed plans when his first short story (the classic *Born of Man and Woman*) sold to the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in the summer of 1950. He began to write professionally, finally moving into the motion picture field in Hollywood (based on the very favorable reception of a screen adaptation of his own novel, *The Shrinking Man*). Dick has written most of the Poe-based series for American-International, as well as numerous TV stories. Although Matheson ably supports his wife and four children by film and television work, his heart remains in prose fiction, and he is at work on several new novels. GAMMA 1 is fortunate in having acquired his latest short story, a carefully-crafted study in mounting tension which never lets down from first word to last.

## CRESCENDO

*Richard Matheson*

"There's something wrong with her," said Mr. Moffat.

Cousin Wendall reached for the sugar bowl. "Then they're right," he said.

"*They are not*," said Mr. Moffat, sharply.

"If it isn't working—" Wendall said.

"She was working fine till they decided to replace her first of the year," said Mr. Moffat.

"What are you so upset about?" Wendall asked. "It's just an organ."

## CRESCENDO

"She is more," said Mr. Moffat. "Eighty years she's been there. Eighty."

"That's a long time," Wendall said, crunching jellied toast. "Maybe too long."

"No; it isn't age," said Mr. Moffat, "It's something else. That's why I want you to stay in the loft with me this morning."

"How come you haven't had an organ repair man check it?"

"He'd just agree with the rest of them," said Mr. Moffat. "He'd say she's old and worn."

"So?" said Wendall.

Mr. Moffat trembled. "She is not," he said. He stared into the blackness of his coffee. "The gall of them," he muttered, "planning to get rid of her. The gall." He closed his eyes.

"Perhaps she knows," he said.

The clock-like tapping of their heels perforated the stillness of the church lobby. Wendall opened the arm-thick door and the two men spiraled up the marble staircase. They entered the loft and moved across its silence. The old man settled on the glass-smooth bench and switched on the lamp. He unlocked and rattled up the organ's rib-skinned top, then pushed the finger-worn switch across its slot. In the room to their right, there was a sudden hum, a mounting rush of energy. The air gauge needle quivered on its dial.

Mr. Moffat said, "She's on now."

Wendall moved across the loft, the old man following.

"What do you think?" Mr. Moffat asked, inside the motor room. Wendall shrugged. "Can't tell," he said. He peered at the motor. "Single-phase induction," he remarked. "Runs by magnetism." He listened to it. "Sounds all right to me," he said.

He walked across the small room. "What's this?" he asked.

"Relay machines," said Mr. Moffat. "Keeps the channels filled with wind."

"And this is the fan?" asked Wendall, pointing.

The old man nodded.

"Looks all right to me," said Wendall.

They returned to the loft and looked at the pipes. Above the burnished wood of the enclosure box, they stood like giant pencils painted gold. "Big," said Wendall.

"She is beautiful," said Mr. Moffat.

Wendall grunted. "Let's hear it now," he said.

Mr. Moffat sat before the keyboards. He pulled out a stop and pressed a key into its bed. A single tone poured out into the shadowed air. The old man pressed a volume pedal and the note grew louder. It pierced the air, tone and overtones reflected off the dome like scattered diamonds.

Suddenly, the old man raised his hand. "You heard?" he asked.

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"Heard what?"

Mr. Moffat swallowed. "She trembled," he said.

As people came into the church that morning, Mr. Moffat played Bach's chorale-prelude *Aus de Tiefe rufe ich* (from the depths, I cry). His fingers moved unerringly across the manual keys, his spindling shoes walked a dance on the pedals, and the air was rich with moving sound. Above the old man's grey-wreathed pate, sunlight filtered through the stained-glass window, passing across the rack of pipes with a mist-like radiance.

Wendall leaned over. "Sounds all right to me," he said.

"Wait," said Mr. Moffat.

Wendall shrugged and moving to the loft edge, looked down at the nave. The three-aisled flow of people was branching into rows, the noise of their movements scaling up like insect scratchings. Wendall watched them as they settled in the brownwood pews. Above and all around them moved the organ's music.

Below, the lobby doors were being shut. Mr. Moffat's gaze jumped to his watch which was propped against the music rack, thence to the pulpit where the Reverend had appeared. He made of the chorale-prelude's final chord a shimmering pyramid of sound, paused, then modulated, *mezzo forte*, to the key of G. He played the opening phrase of the Doxol-

ogy. The Reverend lifted his hands, palms up, and the congregation took its feet. An instant of silence filled the church. Then the singing began.

Mr. Moffat led them through the hymn, his right hand pacing the familiar route. In the final phrase, an adjoining key sank simultaneously with the one he pressed, an alien dissonance blurring the chord. The old man's fingers twitched; the dissonance faded — and the congregation capped its singing with a lingering amen. Mr. Moffat's fingers lifted from the manuals. He switched off the motor, the nave murmured with a crackling rustle as the congregation sat, and the Reverend raised his hands to grip the pulpit railing.

"Heavenly Father," he said, "We, thy children, meet with Thee today in reverent communion."

Up in the loft, a bass note shuddered faintly.

Mr. Moffat hitched up, gasping. His gaze leaped to the switch, (off) to the air gauge needle, (motionless) to the motor room (still). He turned to Wendall. "You heard that," he whispered.

Wendall reached over to flick a nail against the air dial. Nothing happened. Grunting, he turned and started toward the motor room. Mr. Moffat rose and tip toed after him.

"Looks off to me," said Wendall. "I hope so," Mr. Moffat said. He

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felt his hands begin to shake.

The offertory should not be obtrusive but form a staidly moving background for the clink of coins and whispering of bills. Mr. Moffat knew this well. No man put holy tribute to music more properly than he.

But that morning —

Surely, the discords were not his; mistakes were rare for Mr. Moffat. The keys resisting, throbbing underneath his touch like things alive; was that imagined? Chords thinned to fleshless octaves, then, seconds later, thick with sound; was that his doing? The old man, in fearful expectation, listened to the music stir unevenly in the air.

Suddenly, the needle of the volume gauge jumped from *mezzo* to *forte* and the music flared. The old man jerked his pale hands from the keys and, for a moment, heard the sound of usher feet and money falling into baskets. Then his hands returned to playing and the offertory murmured once again, refined and inconspicuous.

"Listen," Wendall said when the collection was over, "how do you know it isn't you?"

"It's *her!*" the old man whispered back.

"That's crazy," Wendall said. "Without you, it's just a contraption."

Mr. Moffat shook his head.

"You said you're disturbed be-

cause they're getting rid of her."

"I am."

"So," said Wendall, "probably you're doing these things yourself, unconsciously."

The old man thought about it. Logically, she *was* an instrument; her sounds governed by his feet and fingers. Without them, she was, as Wendall had said, most reasonably, a contraption — pipes and levers and rows of static keys, knobs without function, pedals and pressuring air.

And yet —

In the middle of the Benediction postlude, the *swell to great* stop suddenly protruded and, before Mr. Moffat's jabbing hand had shoved it in again, the church resounded with a thundering of horns, the air was gorged with swollen, trembling sound.

"It wasn't me!" he whispered when the postlude was over, "I saw it move by itself!"

"I didn't," Wendall said.

Mr. Moffat looked down to where the Reverend had begun to read the words of the next hymn. "I've got to stop the service," he muttered in a shaking voice.

"You can't do that," said Wendall.

"But something's going to happen," said the old man.

"What can happen?" Wendall scoffed. "A few bad notes is all."

The old man sat, afraid, staring at the keys. In his lap, his hands

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wrung, silently, together. As the Reverend finished reading, he played the opening phrase of the hymn; the congregation rose and began to sing.

This time only *he* was conscious of what happened.

He knew that organ tone possesses what is called "inertia," an impersonal character. The organist cannot change this tonal quality; it is inviolate. Yet, Mr. Moffat, clearly, heard, reflected in the music, his own disquiet. Hearing it sent chills of prescience up, his spine. For thirty years he had been organist here. He knew the workings of the organ better than any man — its pressures and reactions were in the memory of his touch.

This morning, it was a strange machine he played.

A machine whose motor, when the hymn was ended, would not stop.

"Switch it off," said Wendall.

"I did!" the old man whispered.

"Try it again."

Mr. Moffat pushed the switch. The motor kept on running. He clenched his teeth and pushed the switch a third and fourth time and the motor stopped. He looked frightenedly at Wendall.

"I've seen this happen before," Wendall told him. "When you push the switch across the slot, it shoves a copper contact across some porcelain. That's what joins the wires so the current can flow.

You push the switch often enough, it leaves a residue of copper on the porcelain and the current can move across it even when the switch is off."

The old man shook his head. "She knows," he said.

"That's crazy!"

"Is it?"

They were in the motor room. Below, the Reverend was delivering his sermon.

"Sure, it's crazy," Wendall told him. "This is a machine, not a person."

"She knows they want her out of here," the old man said.

"Come on," said Wendall, frowning, "I'll tell you what it is. The organ's been shaking the church for eighty years. Shake any place for eighty years and walls begin to warp, floors start tilting. So, step one: this motor starts to tilt and wires go and there's arcing."

"Arcing?"

"Electricity jumping gaps," said Wendall. "Step two: it feeds the electro-magnets in these relay machines and they get extra power; they cause those things to happen."

"I don't know," said Mr. Moffat.

"I do," Wendall said. "Let's go back, it's hot in here."

Back on his bench, Mr. Moffat looked intently at the keyboards.

Things might not be so simple after all, he thought. Who could state, conclusively, that the organ was nothing but inanimate ma-

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chnery? Even if everything that Wendall said was true, was it not possible that these very factors had given some kind of limited comprehension to the organ? Tilting floors and ruptured wires and arcing and overcharged electro-magnets — might not these elements have freakishly bestowed the gift of cognizance?

Mr. Moffat straightened up. Instantly, his breath was halted. The nave blurred before his eyes, it quivered behind a gelatinous haze. The people of the congregation had melted and run together, they were welded substance in his sight. A cough he heard was a hollow detonation miles away. He tried to move but couldn't. Paralyzed, he sat.

It came to him.

Not thought in words so much as raw sensation pulsing in his mind. Mr. Moffat shuddered on the bench. Of himself, there remained only enough to think in horror — *she* does know! The rest was crushed beneath overwhelming power which filled him totally. The church was gone, the congregation gone, the Reverend and Wendall gone. The old man pendulumed above a pit of blackness, fear and dread and hatred, like dark winds, tearing at him.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

Wendall's whisper jarred him back. Mr. Moffat blinked.

"What happened? You were

turning on the organ."

"Turning on —?"

"And smiling," Wendall said.

A trembling sound shook Mr. Moffat's throat. Abruptly, he was conscious of the Reverend's voice, reading the words of the final hymn. "No," he murmured.

"What is it?" Wendall asked.

"I mustn't turn her on."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I—"

The old man's breath cut off as the Reverend ceased to speak and looked up, waiting. No, thought Mr. Moffat. Premonition gripped him. He felt a scream threatening in his throat as he watched his hand reach out and push the switch.

The motor started.

Mr. Moffat began to play the organ — or, rather, it began to play itself pushing up and drawing down his fingers at its will. Amorphous panic churned the old man's insides. He felt an overpowering urge to switch the motor off and flee. Instead, he played on while, below, armed in their pews, the people sang.

"No," whined Mr. Moffat.

Wendall didn't hear. The old man watched the pressure rising. He watched the needle of the volume gauge move past *mezzo* toward *forte*. A whimper filled his throat. *No, please*, he thought.

The *swell to great stop* slid out like the head of some emerging

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snake. Mr. Moffat thumbed it in with desperation. The *swell unison* button began to quiver. The old man held it in; he felt it throbbing under his finger. A dew of sweat broke out across his brow. He glanced below and saw the people squinting up at him. His eyes fled to the volume needle as it shook toward *grand crescendo*.

"Wendall, try to —!"

Mr. Moffat had no time to finish. The *swell to great* stop slithered out again, the air ballooned with sound. The old man jabbed it back. He felt keys and pedals dropping in their beds. Suddenly, the *swell unison* button was out; a peal of unchecked clamor filled the church.

*The organ was alive!*

He gasped as Wendall reached down to jab the switch. Nothing happened. Wendall cursed and rocked the switch back and forth. The motor kept on running. Pressure found its peak, each pipe shuddering with storm winds. Tones and overtones flooded out of them in a paroxysm of sound. The hymn fell mangled underneath a weight of hostile chords.

Wendall shouted, "It won't go off!"

Once more, the *swell to great* stop jumped out and, coupled with the volume pedal, pounded the walls of the church with dissonance. Mr. Moffat lunged for it. Freed, the *swell unison* button

shot out again. The raging sound grew thicker yet. It was a howling giant shouldering the church. *Grand crescendo*. Slow vibrations filled the floors and walls.

Abruptly, Wendall leaped to the railing and shouted, "Out! Get out!" Bound in panic, Mr. Moffat pushed at the switch again and again, but the organ only galed out music that was no longer music but attacking sound.

"Get out!" Wendall shouted at the congregation, "Hurry!"

The windows went first, exploding from their frames as if cannon shells had pierced them. A hail of shattered rainbow showered on the congregation. Women shrieked, their voices pricking at the music's vast ascension. People lurched from their pews. Sound flooded at the walls in tidelike waves. The chandeliers went off like crystal bombs.

"Hurry!" Wendall yelled. "Get out! Get out!"

Mr. Moffat couldn't move. He sat staring at the manual keys as they fell like toppling dominoes; he listened to the screaming of the organ. Wendall grabbed his arm and pulled him off the bench. Above, two last windows disintegrated into clouds of glass. Beneath their feet, they felt the massive shudder of the church.

"No." The old man's voice could not be heard but his intent was clear as he jerked his arm from

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Wendall's grip and stumbled backward toward the railing.

"Are you crazy?" Wendall grabbed the old man brutally. They spun around in battle. Below, the aisles were swollen, the congregation a fear-mad boil of exodus.

"Let me go!" screamed Mr. Mofat. "I have to stay!"

Wendall grabbed him bodily and dragged him from the loft. The storming dissonance rushed after them on the staircase, drowning out the old man's cries. Up in the loft, the organ played alone, its stops all out, most of its volume pedals down, motor spinning, bellows shuddering, pipe mouths shrieking fiercely.

Suddenly, a wall cracked open. Arch frames twisted, grinding stone on stone. A jagged block of plaster crumbled off the dome, falling to the pews as white dust. All the floors began to shudder violently. The congregation flooded from the doors. Behind their screaming, shoving ranks, a window frame broke loose and somersaulted to the floor. Another crack jagged crazily down a wall. The air swam thick with plaster dust. Bricks began to fall.

Put on the sidewalk, Mr. Mofat stood in motionless horror, staring at the church.

*It had been him.* How could he have failed to know it? His fear, his dread, his hatred. Fear of, also, being scrapped, replaced; dread of being shut out from the things he loved and needed; hatred of a world that had no use for aged things. It was he who turned the overpowered organ into a maniac machine.

Now, the last of the congregation was out. Inside, the first wall collapsed, falling in a clamorous rain of brick, wood and plaster. Beams tottered like trees, then toppled quickly, smashing down the pews.

Up in the loft, the bass notes began; the notes so low that they had no audible pitch but were only vibration in the air. Mechanically, the pedals dropped one by one, piling up a monstrous chord which was the roar of some titanic animal. Floors buckled, the dome hung for an instant, then rushed down and mangled half the nave. A cloud of mortar dust enveloped everything. Within its swimming opacity, the church, with a crackling, splintering, crashing, thundering explosion, fell.

Sometime later, when the old man stumbled dazedly among the sun-lit ruins, he heard the organ breathing like some unseen beast dying in an ancient forest.





